

**Radical Democracies:  
The Politics of the Aesthetic in the Southern Cone**

by

Katherine Critchfield

King's College  
University of Cambridge

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## **Preface**

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except where specifically indicated in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution.

It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.

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**Introduction:**  
**Wounded Democracies**

*Herencia neoliberal o futuro despegue capitalista en la economía de esta 'demos-gracia'. Un futuro inalcanzable para estos chicos, un chiste cruel de la candidatura, la traición de la candidatura, la traición de la patria libre. Salvándose de las botas para terminar charqueados en la misma carroña, en el mismo estropajo que los vio nacer.*

Pedro Lemebel, *La esquina es mi corazón*

### ***The Wounding of Democracy***

The Chilean author Pedro Lemebel (1952-2015) fashioned much of his narrative from a denouncement of the illusory and spurious nature of political transition in Chile, with his *crónicas* overwhelmingly working to expose the delusion of democracy that characterises the neoliberal post-dictatorship era. As highlighted in the epigraph above, in '*La esquina es mi corazón (o los New Kids del bloque)*', published in the collection of the same name in 1995, Lemebel lambasts the political and economic order that continues to create subjects who are so marginal, so abject, as to scarcely exist. Or rather, to exist surrounded by a (literal and figurative) violence that leaves its marks on their environment and on their very bodies. A far cry from the illusion of economic progress that sustains the narrative of the transition to democracy, these *new kids* are stultified on the street corner, surrounded by 'surcos' and 'grietas', a disintegrating infrastructure in a part of the city nobody cares about. The kids themselves are 'charqueados', 'hacinados', 'carne de cañón', 'desecho sudamericano', beaten up and broken down. Like yesterday's throwaway commodities, they too are obsolescent in a culture characterised by its fixation on immediate gratification and on the fantasy of the eternal present. The lives of these marginal subjects are shown in counterpoint to the deceptive fiction sold by the global neoliberal machine:

Pareciera entonces que cada nacimiento en uno de estos bloques, cada pañal ondulante que presupone una nueva vida, estuviera manchado por un trágico devenir. Parecieran inútiles los detergentes y su alba propaganda feliz, inútil el refregado, inútiles los sueños profesionales o universitarios para estos péndex de última fila. (1995: 34-5)

The very beginning of life, usually a trope invested with hope for a brighter future is here paired with the repetitious 'inútil', so that not only is the promise of capitalist mass media shown to be entirely empty, but life itself under these unequal terms, while purportedly afforded the freedom enshrined by democracy, is envisioned as an unrelenting entrapment. The only freedom here is the freedom enjoyed by the neoliberal market.

And yet, the return to democracy in Chile is supposed to represent a triumph, both politically and economically. Discursively, we are supposed to accept both a temporal progression (a *transition* away from violent dictatorship and towards liberal democracy) and a clear division between the two political regimes (marked by the *post* of post-dictatorship). Many Chilean critics have already demarcated the falsity of both of these assumptions. Most notably Tomás Moulian, writing in *Chile actual: Anatomía de un mito*, details the continuity between the two political regimes of dictatorship and democracy. The contemporary nation<sup>1</sup> according to Moulian is a society whose ‘lineamientos generales fueron definidos durante la dictadura y donde, como es natural, sobreviven sus plagas asociadas’ (2002: 9). Specifically, the continuities between dictatorship and transition are embodied in:

a) una democracia de baja intensidad invadida por la ideología tecnocrática, cuyo formalismo genera una fuerte indiferencia hacia la política institucional y un alto desprestigio de los profesionales de la actividad y b) una cultura en la cual priman los componentes individualistas y adquisitivos por sobre los componentes asociativos y expresivos. (Ibid)

While the difference between the political systems of dictatorship and democracy should not be understated, particularly in the context of a nation that has lived through an oppressive, authoritarian government, this does not mean that the protected democracy formed after dictatorship is without limitations, nor that it should be insulated from critique. The democracy of the transition period in Chile is primarily compromised, as Moulian describes, by its subordination of the political to the economic. This results in a reduced capacity for popular participation in the political sphere since neoliberal hegemony insists upon its own irrefutable scientific and historical rationality, and mistrusts the potential chaos arising from the popular vote and all popular action. Related to this is the reduction in collective and affective political action, as previously embodied in the (now largely defunct) parties of the political left, in favour of an individualism founded in the mass integration of middle and working classes into the economic system through the logic of credit-card consumerism. Of course, these latter expressions of the subordination of the political to the economic are now almost universal in their predominance. Yet the national specificities of the post-dictatorship reality in Chile make its democratic limitations seem particularly immutable.

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<sup>1</sup> Moulian’s book was first published in 1997, and re-published with a new introduction asserting its continued validity to political and social analysis in 2002, since ‘Las ideas matrices son hoy las mismas: primacía del mercado, crecimiento por chorreo, consenso en cuanto a que la economía libre y la democracia representativa constituyen el “mundo feliz”’ (15).

According to Moulian, this is because the state of the contemporary nation is wholly a production of dictatorship. Constitutional changes written during dictatorship have ensured political continuity, such that the military continues to be configured as the guardian of national security and political stability. As a result, the armed forces are afforded a degree of political and financial autonomy, as well as having access to the Senate through a number of designated seats. The designated senators have been able to block political actions attempted by the *Concertación* government in the transition period on numerous occasions. As a result, ‘La Concertación no puede ir más allá de cambios pactados con alguno de los partidos de derecha o con los senadores designados’ (2002: 55). Such constitutional continuity has resulted not only in the continuation of the neoliberal (free-market) economics implemented under dictatorship, but also in a political consensus marked by a failure to imagine an alternative social or economic structure for the nation. According to Moulian, consensus is the recognition of ‘núcleos racionales básicos’ in Pinochet’s government, namely ‘la economía y la estructura social’ (Ibid: 43). The only domain seen to require any alteration was the political (i.e., a shift from dictatorship to democracy). Of course, the wholehearted adherence to a government founded in consensus places severe restraints on the expression of politics beyond neoliberal hegemony. ‘La política ya no existe más como lucha de alternativas, como historicidad, existe solo como historia de las pequeñas variaciones, ajustes, cambios en aspectos que no comprometan la dinámica global’ (Ibid: 44). However, the notion of political pragmatism has largely superseded political ideology, such that the very thinking of political alternatives to the status quo is seen to be impossible.

In part, as described above, Lemebel’s text works to expose the limitation of democracy by neoliberal consensus politics. However, it furthermore offers a contribution intended to move towards an aesthetic contestation of this status quo. While, as Lemebel indicates, not only does the democracy that is derived from consensus-driven consumerism represent little more than ‘un chiste cruel’ in its failure to provide the freedom and equality its propaganda machine sells, we are all supposed to unquestioningly accept its political and economic rightness, and be endlessly grateful for the progress it ostensibly represents. The current political regime is not a straightforward ‘democracia’, but rather what Lemebel creatively and subversively terms the ‘demos-gracia’, the bringing together of the nation in an act of collective gratitude for its liberation. Such gratitude, of course, reasserts a previously-defined hierarchy of active givers (the technocratic political elite) and passive receivers (the meek and ultimately impotent national subjects). And so while the kids in Lemebel’s story are no longer at the mercy of military boots (the ‘botas’), they remain marked by the wounds of



inequality. Freedom as a discursive ideal has failed them, since it is founded in the capitalist marketplace, and democracy has also failed, since it refers only to the periodic calling of elections and the enshrinement of the right to consume. The ‘demos-gracia’ is different from the dictatorship only in its self presentation. The wounded bodies that are abandoned on the street corners testify to the continuities (the ‘misma carroña’, the ‘mismo estropajo’) rather than the distinctions between two political regimes, pointing in particular to the continuation of forms of social abjection that serve as constant reminders of the political failures of the post-dictatorship.

Yet the political effect of the aesthetic production here is intended to extend beyond mere denunciation. Rather Lemebel uses language to open up the slightest hint of a space – a crack in the armour – that might challenge the hegemony of the global neoliberal order. The ambiguous use of the imperfect subjunctive mood (‘pareciera’ and ‘estuviera’ instead of a more straightforward ‘parece’ and ‘está’) points to a contingency of identity that can be exploited as a zone where contestatory subjects may appear. *It would seem that they should be*, but what they *are* remains unvoiced. This subtle distinction between ascribed identity and claimed subjectivity points to Lemebel’s political challenge to hegemonic power, expressed firmly in aesthetic terms. In other words, faced with the dominance of globalised neoliberalism, language itself becomes the only possible battleground for dissensus.

Lemebel’s critique of liberal democracy that is thus demarcated in the body made wound, and in subjectivities resolutely undefined, is part of a broader aesthetic challenge to the circumscribed democracies of the post-dictatorship period in both Argentina and Chile. In another aesthetic engagement with the limitations of neoliberal democracy, in 1980, the Chilean poet Raúl Zurita attempted to blind himself by throwing liquid ammonia in his eyes. Writing in an epilogue to Zurita’s collection *Anteparaiso*, published in 1982, Diamela Eltit – then Zurita’s creative and romantic partner, as well as a co-founder of the radical art collective CADA – describes this action as follows:

El 18 de Marzo de 1980, el que escribió este libro atentó contra sus ojos, para cegarse, arrojándose amoníaco puro sobre ellos. Resultó con quemaduras en los párpados, parte del rostro y sólo lesiones menores en las córneas; nada más me dijo entonces, llorando, que el comienzo del Paraíso ya no iría.  
Yo también lloré junto a él, pero qué importa ahora, si ése es el mismo que ha podido pensar toda esta maravilla. (1982: 160)

Zurita had earlier burned his own cheek, and poetically documented the act himself in the collection *Purgatorio* (1979). In being thus written into Zurita’s poetry, the mutilation of the

body comes to form part of his poetic practice, albeit a practice that cannot be immediately conceptualised within the aesthetic domain, since it remains difficult to ignore the troubling implications of the action of self-mutilation and coolly theorise it as art, politics, or political art. However, Zurita's attempted blinding, read as part of a poetic *oeuvre*, can also provide some insight into his aesthetic engagements with the concept of radical democracy.

While the No Plebiscite did not bring an official end to Pinochet's dictatorship until 1990, 1980 is the year that the new constitution was approved. This constitution established the timeline and parameters for the transition to democracy in Chile. The year 1980 therefore marks a key point in the thinking about democracy for the nation. Notably, the transition in Chile is founded in this new constitution and in the notion of 'protected democracy' which it enshrines. The concept of 'protected democracy' was introduced under Pinochet's regime in what Susana Draper (2012) describes as a 'deeply authoritarian piece of legislation that included, among other things, eight-year presidential terms, limits to the powers of Congress, and mechanisms to ensure the power of the armed forces over future governments' (128). Any democracy that emerged under these terms was certainly compromised by association with dictatorship, as well as by being linked so strongly with the neoliberal economic system implemented by Pinochet.

In light of the contemporary political environment, then, Zurita's act of self-wounding must be read not only in terms of dictatorship but also of nascent democracy. His attempt in 1980 to blind himself has multiple meanings within the context of the two. In the first place, it operates as a metaphoric reflection of the nation, heading blindly down the road of compromised democracy without wishing to see or acknowledge the latter's predetermination by authoritarian rule, and simultaneously deliberately ignoring the violent past of the dictatorship. The intensely personal nature of the action against the body additionally reflects Zurita's own desire to fail to see; in the face of political brutality and violence, the temptation to look away is often overwhelming. The metaphorical refusal visually to acknowledge the reality of the political situation here becomes literal in the body, in the flesh made wound. This self-wounding is also part of Zurita's broader poetic linkage of personal pain and collective redemption. In interview with Daniel Borzutzky (2015), Zurita describes his poetry as the necessary documentation of pain and despair that, for him, precedes the attempt to discover hope:

It's an attempt to arrive at, to touch the darkest zones, the most wounded zones of our experience and our history. Because only by arriving at these points is it possible to reimagine the ability to hope, and to reimagine the possibility of a new life. (2015)

Throughout his poetic *oeuvre*, Zurita insists upon the impossibility of forgetting the violence of dictatorship, and therefore on the necessarily lingering presence of the wound. When he inflicts wounds upon his own body, he makes manifest the place he envisages not only for poetry but for himself as a poet who must ceaselessly reflect upon traumatic memory. For Zurita, the question of a ‘post’-dictatorship can only be considered in relation to the principled retention of the wounds of dictatorship. The wounding is the division that he retains as the foundation for a new commonality. Furthermore, Zurita’s privileging of the affective above – and literally here, at the expense of – the visual dimension, functions as an aesthetic intervention into the ordering of the realm of sensible distribution (a term described in full below), which subordinates the body, and especially bodily pain, to other more visible forms of political expression. Considered as a purely aesthetic action, therefore, his self-wounding works to expand the categories of the political: of what can be said, and how it can be expressed, and by whom it can be heard or seen (and importantly here, felt).

A similar aesthetic emphasis on both the body and the wound can be observed in the poem ‘Herida pierna’ (*Austria Hungria*, also published in 1980) by Argentine poet Néstor Perlongher. In Argentina, the end of the dictatorship occurred under different circumstances than in Chile. The *junta* which had seized power in 1976 initially had widespread support following a period of economic crisis and escalating political violence with right-wing paramilitary organisations and left-wing guerrilla groups pitted against one another. The *junta* instituted a ‘dirty war’ which sought to purge the nation of opposition to its political regime, with conservative estimates of 20,000 people killed and a further 10,000 disappeared. As a result, by the 1980s, support for the dictatorship was waning, and it was partly in response to this that General Leopoldo Galtieri, who had assumed leadership of the *junta* in 1981, began a nationalist struggle to seize control of the *Islas Malvinas* (under British rule since 1833). When Britain, then under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, responded by sending a large military force to defend its claim to the islands, Argentina found itself embroiled in a bloody campaign that soon drew intense antigovernment criticism (Skidmore and Smith, 1997: 107). When its forces had to surrender, the military government’s unpopularity reached unprecedented levels, with large-scale anti-military mobilisation leading to the eventual return of civilian rule in 1983. However, similar questions about the role of memory and the violent past emerge in Argentina as in Chile, owing to the implementation of military impunity laws and the issuing of presidential pardons in the post-dictatorship period. Also as in Chile, the post-dictatorship period saw a widespread commitment to neoliberal economic policies, with ‘widespread privatization [...] of services

that once belonged to state-owned companies' (Draper, 2012: 30), although the economic 'miracle' of Chile was evidently not present in Argentina, with inflation running at 900% in 1983. Although the historical, political, social, and economic specificities are different in the case of each of the two nations, therefore, democracy emerges under similarly compromised terms in both.

As in the texts by Lemebel and Zurita, the wounded body is also a significant trope in the poetry of Perlongher. Even before dictatorship had come to an end, Perlongher reflects upon the wounded body, and its insistent place within his poetry:

Coser los bordes de la herida? debo? puedo? es debido?  
 he podido? suturarla doliente ya, doliéndome  
 rastreramente husmeando como un perro  
 oh señor a sus pies oh señor con esa pierna  
 atada amputada anestesiada doblada pierna. (1997a: 47)

The questioning not only of the possibility of suturing the wound, but the rightness of such an act of healing (not only '¿puedo?' but also '¿debo?') implies the problematic engagement with traumatic memory faced by many Argentine writers and artists towards the end of dictatorship and at the beginning of the transition to democracy. The repetition of the interrogative form places poetry in the position of investigator not only into the facts of the past, but also into the way in which these facts can be employed towards a radical political shift. Perlongher's emphasis on the edges of the open wound ('los bordes') suggests a movement towards a generalised dissolution of borders as part of the queer aesthetic employed by the author here, as elsewhere in his poetry. This latter focus is strengthened by the reference on the fourth line to the 'señor' at whose feet the narrator is prostrated, in imagery that is highly suggestive of sado-masochistic sex. This effect is redoubled in the second stanza with its references to 'los estiletes en el muslo', 'la penetración del verdugo durante el acto del suplicio' and 'la sofocación de los gemidos', among other increasingly explicit moments of (sexual) violence and wounding. However, the final and lasting impression of the poetic stanza cited above is Perlongher's emphasis on the wound. The alliterative triple description of the 'pierna' – 'atada amputada anestesiada' – serves to emphasise the bodily division that remains as a central foundation to the poem, creating, through its assonantal reverberations, a haunting echo of the broken body politic that survives dictatorship. Perlongher's forceful reiteration of the bodily wound points to a political effort to allow those echoes of the abject remainders of dictatorship to bleed through the putative closure that divides the dictatorship from the post-period. The political effect of Perlongher's

aesthetic choices works precisely through this concept of the excess which overflows any effort to order the *sensus communis*. The aesthetic choices he makes refuse containment, refuse to allow the edges of the wound to be closed, refuse any expression of aesthetico-political closure.

In all three of the above aesthetic examples, the concept of the body-as-wound is paramount to the politics of the text. In the first place, in all three cases, the wound represents an insistence upon a necessary division at the heart of the political. As an alternative to the *demos-gracia*, Lemebel and the other authors and artists whose work I explore in this project, attempt to uncover a more radical expression of democracy, both in the political and the aesthetic spheres, one which is founded in, and ethically refuses to move beyond, the expression of division. The un-sutured wound here is precisely the embodiment of that division. This analysis draws in part on the work of Chilean cultural critic Nelly Richard, who, in her text *Cultural Residues* (2004) locates aesthetic transgression in post-dictatorship art in Chile in a similar emphasis on fragmentation, schisms, ruins, and remainders. For Richard, ‘to insist on the residualness of the dictatorship’s traces in order to give them a value-laden thickness’, is crucial in any effort to destabilize official symbols (2004c: 7). A study of aesthetics that focuses on residues and fragmentation can therefore imbue works of art and cultural production with a transgressive energy that itself works politically, provoking debate about the terms in which the political sphere presents itself and through which it can be spoken and heard.

As Moulian discusses, neoliberal democracy presents itself as harmony, order, rationality, and completion in order to further its hegemonic control – *Chile Actual* represents its political and economic realities as inevitable ‘porque se re/presenta como la Única Racionalidad’ (2002: 25). The division that the artists and authors under study place at the centre of their texts functions then in part as a counterpoint to the official symbols of neoliberal democracy. The aesthetic shift away from corporeal wholeness and towards the body represented as wound is one aspect of this attempt to make present the disorder and division that is required of a politics that opposes the consensus demanded by neoliberal ideology. However, where Richard shares many of her metaphors for demarcating the political potential of the aesthetic with poststructuralist thought, and especially with the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (the aesthetic as *revelatory* of possible fissures, lines of flight, and so on), I will point to the ways in which the aesthetic is also being conceived in the post-dictatorship texts I engage as an *always-already* political category.

In the second place, therefore, I will argue that the textual emphasis on the wounded

body is indicative not only of a conceptualisation of politics as division, but also of a changing conception of the aesthetic as a radical political category in the post-dictatorship period. During the transitions to democracy in Argentina and Chile, the previously commonplace association of dissensual politics with an aesthetics founded in the revelation of the brutal reality of repressive dictatorship begins to give way to a more complex relationship between the two categories. Through the image of the wounded body, which grounds a new imaginary of the political community in the work of those artists studied in this investigation, the political is simultaneously founded in the aesthetic. This is in direct contrast to the aesthetico-political closure offered by the testimonial text which, as Idelber Avelar discusses in *The Untimely Present*, is the privileged form of aesthetic engagement with the political in the aftermath of dictatorship. As Avelar contends, while the political truth of testimonial literature dealing with dictatorship must be defended, its problematic subordination of the aesthetic to the political cannot be ignored. The testimonial text can offer the comforting vision of a future redemption for literature, 'being announced by a subaltern voice transparently coincident with its experience and supplying the critical-oppositional intellectual with the golden opportunity to satisfy a good conscience' (1999: 67). Yet precisely because of this promising vision, testimony has typically not been subject to the same stringency of aesthetic criticism as other literary or artistic engagements with dictatorship. For Avelar, the result is 'that testimonial literature has left a very meager legacy for the reinvention of memory after the dictatorships' (Ibid: 64). This is because testimonial texts fail to interrogate their own aesthetic status as bearers of truth and memory, and as such frequently fall into the same discursive binarisms of the logic of dictatorship itself. The result is a similar elision of politics from the texts, or as Avelar writes, 'Oblivion was all the more facilitated once those atrocities were piled up in a language that very rarely asked questions about its own status' (Ibid: 67). Privileged language that fails to interrogate its own status represents an ordering of the sensible sphere which reinforces binary values and therefore ultimately hierarchical divisions.

In contrast, the texts I study as part of this project represent a parallel movement towards other signficatory sensibilities, as represented here by the focus on the wound. In other words, they found the political in a different sensorium: that of the body and its emissions (tears, blood, semen), in emotions, and in affect. In so doing, they move beyond the denunciatory text as the political aesthetic *par excellence*, pointing instead to aesthetic distributions that remain excessive, that overspill any effort to order the *sensus communis*. The wound is emblematic of this aesthetic expression of contamination, contagion, and a lack

of clearly defined physical boundaries. Furthermore, the aesthetic itself here is a dissensual category of politics, being founded in division, in the excessive, and in the disruption of borders.

### ***Argentina and Chile: The Creation of the ‘demos-gracia’***

As described above, the texts with which I engage in this project are all seeking the expression of a radical democracy that moves beyond the *demos-gracia* identified by Lemebel. In large part, they problematise contemporary democracy in both Argentina and Chile on the grounds of its seemingly unassailable association with neoliberal economics. Since neoliberalism is a global (and globalising) phenomenon, this is a global problem in contemporary studies of democracy. In the collection entitled *Democracy In What State* (Agamben et al, 2009), this association between politics and neoliberal economics is shown to contradict both the etymological and historical meaning of the political system of democracy. Etymologically, as Wendy Brown establishes, the term relates to the *demos*, or people: ‘The term carries a simple and purely political claim that the people rule themselves, that the whole rather than the part or an Other is politically sovereign’ (2009: 45). However, what we call democracy today is very far from being this rule by the people. Indeed, as Daniel Bensaid points out, ‘Fear of the masses and a passion for law and order are the real foundations of liberal ideology’ (Ibid: 17). Democracy under these terms has become synonymous with ‘the victorious West, the triumphant United States of America, the free market, and the level playing field’ (Ibid: 17-18). This liberal democracy is concomitant not with the rule of the people but with the shrinking of the public sphere and hence with the opportunity for the people to be heard. This silencing and exclusion, which is the unspoken core of contemporary liberal democracy is, of course, in direct opposition to its foundation in the *demos*, which is to say, in the ability of not only everybody, but specifically of *anybody* to be heard as a speaking actor in the political sphere. In Kristin Ross’s terms, ‘The power of the *demos* is neither the power of the population nor its majority but rather the power of anybody’ (Ibid: 89). Equality is implicit in the original meaning of democracy – as Brown writes, ‘premodern, republican democracy was premised on the value of ruling in common – rule by the common for the common – and hence centered on a principle of equality’. However, disrupted and distorted by the spread of corporate power, the market, management, and the dissolution of national boundaries in the face of post-national globalisation,

democracy is now premised upon the idea not of equality but of freedom. The argument is that only 'democracy can make us free because only in democracy do we author the powers that govern us'. Yet this ode to freedom, which we are supposed to believe is the final goal of civilised society, is in reality composed of 'hierarchies, exclusions, and subordinating violences'. (Ibid: 51-2)

A radical critique of democracy in post-dictatorship Chile and Argentina certainly portrays the democratic ideal as compromised by the affiliation of a nominal democracy with globalised liberal capitalism. However, these two nations are the site of an additional critique of liberal democracy in the perceived continuity in both cases between repressive dictatorship and the democracy that follows. There is a temporal coincidence in political events in Argentina and Chile from the 1970s onwards, and the temptation therefore exists to read the countries as a single Southern Cone block with homogenous historical experiences. However, this would be to underestimate the differences between the political situations of the two nations, both historically and contemporaneously.

In the case of Chile, in order to understand the specific political problems of the transition period, it is necessary to return to 1970 and the election of Salvador Allende's *Unidad Popular* government. From the 1950s, Chile experienced a period of democratic stability, characterised by fiercely competitive elections, ideological polarisation, and the formation of (fragile and changeable) political alliances. Voter rates for this period were high, and electoral results were unchallenged by accusations of ballot rigging or corruption (Skidmore and Smith, 1997: 128). During this same period, however, Chile faced increasing socioeconomic problems:

The steady exodus of the rural poor to the cities, especially Santiago, continued. There they were ill-housed, ill-fed, and ill-educated. Furthermore, there was little work. These 'marginals' were the tragic underside of capitalist urbanization in a Third World country. By the 1960s about 60 percent of the Chilean population lived in urban areas. (Ibid: 131)

At the same time, the US was engaged in a campaign to isolate the political left in Chile. As Frances Webber points out, neo-imperialistic attitudes have long characterised the US relationship with Chile such that 'By the time of Allende's election victory on September 4, 1970, the US had spent more than \$1 billion over twenty years secretly supporting the Christian Democrat government in Chile to prevent just such an occurrence' (2005: 85). However, in 1970, the Socialists and Communists joined in a coalition under the banner of *Unidad Popular* (the UP), running Allende as their candidate to the presidency. Allende won



a narrow victory, with 36.3 percent of the votes. His opponent from the right, Jorge Alessandri received 34.9 percent, so Allende's mandate to govern was worryingly fragile.

However, Allende's government is significant for its impact on the way in which politics is understood both in Chile and globally. The UP government was lauded by the Western European and North American left as an example of a peaceful road to socialism, at a time when the Soviet Union had similarly acknowledged this as a political possibility (Figueroa Clark, 2013: 3). Chile became an internationally inspirational model for leftist politics, pointing to a new, nonviolent means of revolution. Notwithstanding these auspicious beginnings, as Moulian establishes, the Popular Unity government suffered so many problems during its short tenure in power that it was, practically speaking, doomed from the very start:

La Unidad Popular sucumbió asfixiada por el acoso externo, las divisiones intestinas, los círculos viciosos sin solución. No tenía los medios para hacer la revolución que había anunciado. Como la posibilidad de lo prometido se alejaba, compensó la distancia creciente entre la realidad y los deseos con declaraciones de fidelidad a sus utopías. Con ello, hizo cada vez menos posible la negociación que necesitaba. (2002: 162)

These internally and externally imposed problems increased in severity as time passed. By 1972, the economy was in turmoil, and mass demonstrations and political violence from both ends of the political spectrum had become the norm. Chile experienced boycotts and blockades by shopkeepers and truck owners, and strikes by small businessmen, farmers, and pilots, who all feared for their own economic security under a socialist society. These forms of social protest were not limited to Chilean nationals. The involvement of the US government via the CIA in compromising Allende's ability to govern the nation through a series of covert operations has been fully documented by Peter Kornbluh in the collection of declassified documents published as *The Pinochet File*. Kornbluh describes and evidences US attempts at destabilising the democratically-elected government through the withdrawal of economic links, and the simultaneous funding of groups politically-sympathetic to US foreign policy goals, including the right-wing paper *El Mercurio*, and right-wing militant groups who were responsible for actions such as the 1973 truck-drivers' strike which paralysed the nation. At the same time, and in spite of the economic crisis, the government was able to mobilise large numbers of the population in support of its policies. The UP supporters, who marched in their hundreds of thousands, 'included the many Chileans who had already begun to experience significant changes – higher real wages, subsidized fresh milk, a role in administering their community or workplace' (Skidmore and Smith, 1997:

138). As the street mobilisations and associated violence were supplemented with incidents of terrorism, it seemed that Allende would be unable to maintain national peace until the next election, due in 1976. By September 1973, the nation was politically polarised, and ready for drastic action. ‘En el momento del golpe militar la sociedad estaba saturada por expectativas paranoicas, odios profundos, ansiedad compulsiva de una resolución, sin importar demasiado la manera. Se había desarrollado un síndrome maquiavélico’ (Moulian, 2002: 162). And on September 11, 1973, the military seized power.

As army chief, General Augusto Pinochet presided over ‘the most violent coup in twentieth-century South American history’ (Skidmore and Smith, 1997: 141). The military junta embarked upon a process of total political reconstruction, undoing not only the transition to socialism that Allende had overseen, but also the last vestiges of the democracy that had permitted the left to make such dramatic electoral gains. Especially under the first decade of dictatorship, the Chilean state operated through the spread of terror. It exercised absolute dominion over the bodies of its citizens, and was regulated neither by law nor by morality in the application of its power. The abuses carried out against national subjects have been well documented in art and literature, in official reports (the Rettig Commission of 1991 and the Valech Commission of 2004), and in many and various victim testimonials. The Rettig Report affirms that the dictatorship was a period of ‘intense political repression which resulted in political killings and “disappearances,” the imprisonment or exile of countless Chileans, and the widespread use of torture’ (USIP, 1993: 7). It documented 2,279 victims of human rights violations and political violence (of which 1,068 were extra-judicially executed by government agents, and 957 were *detenidos-desaparecidos* (Ibid: 1122)).<sup>2</sup> The Valech Commission, which was tasked with documenting not only executed victims but also political prisoners detained and subjected to torture during the dictatorship produced an official number of 28,459 victims in its initial report of 2004. However, these figures are generally assumed to be lower than the reality, as Steve Stern discusses in his text *Remembering Pinochet’s Chile*.

In a country of only 10 million people in 1973, individually proved cases of death or disappearance by state agents (or persons in their hire) amount to about 3,000; torture victims run in the dozens of thousands; documented political arrests exceed 82,000; the exile flow amounts to about 200,000. These are lower-end figures, suitable for a rock-bottom baseline. Even using a conservative methodology, a reasonable estimated toll for deaths and disappearances by state agents is 3,500-4,500, for political detentions

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<sup>2</sup> The Rettig Report investigated only human rights violations that led to death, since its mandate was to provide the truth about these abuses as quickly as possible in the immediate aftermath of dictatorship.

150,000-200,000. Some credible torture estimates surpass the 100,000 threshold, some credible exile estimates reach 400,000. (2004: xxi)

The human rights violations that occurred under Pinochet are clearly vast in scope, and the number of subjects affected is highly significant to any possible sense of national community created in the aftermath of dictatorship. Yet in spite of official reports into the abuses, as well as other forms of victim testimony, the extreme violence of the dictatorship is a subject with a capacity for controversy and divisiveness extending to the present day. The aesthetic expressions of the wounded body, which I discuss above, are by no means a universally accepted framework for a discussion of the political in the post-dictatorship period; indeed their very rarity makes their dissensual political potential all the more striking.

Pinochet's regime lasted until 1990, following the National Plebiscite in 1988 in which Chileans voted not to extend his term by a further eight years. The first democratic elections were held in 1989, and Patricio Aylwin was sworn in as president the following year. Aylwin was a member of the Christian Democrat Party, but stood for election as the *Concertación (de Partidos por la Democracia)* candidate. The *Concertación* was a coalition of centre-left political parties, and every president of Chile since Pinochet, with the exception of Sebastián Piñera's four-year term (2010-2014), has been elected under its banner. Chile is frequently considered in international circles to provide a model for a successful transition to democracy in the wake of violent dictatorship. As Lessie-Jo Frazier comments in *Salt in the Sand*, the transition in Chile is perceived as a political triumph in two ways. Primarily, for its pioneering 'model of truth and reconciliation commissions' (2007: 245), which have advanced a precedent for similar responses to human rights violations, especially in Africa. At the same time, she adds, 'Chile served as a model for neoliberal economic structural reorientation, especially in relation to former Soviet bloc countries' (Ibid). Yet, as discussed above, critics of the dominant *Concertación* government point to conspicuous continuities between the political, economic, and cultural paradigms of dictatorship and democracy.

In the first place, the Chilean Constitution in its most recent incarnation is itself a product of the dictatorship, approved by plebiscite in 1980. This document, which also established the parameters for a future transition to democracy, has ensured a political continuity between the dictatorship and subsequent democratic governments that has proven hard to undermine. The constitutional continuity has been significant in two features of political life in post-dictatorship Chile. Firstly, it has ensured economic continuity for the nation. The neoliberal restructuring of the economy carried out under Pinochet was very

much in the interest of social and political elites, and while the political structure of the nation has certainly changed, political leaders continue to come from the same elite social group (and even the same family in the case of Aylwin's successor Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle, the son of Eduardo Frei Montalva, the President of Chile between 1964 and 1970). Even were it not in the interest of the political elite to allow for the continuation of the neoliberal regime, major political, economic, or social change is difficult after dictatorship since the 'military crafted state continuity by successfully packing the legislative and judicial branches with supporters and by protecting the structure and personnel of the armed forces' (Frazier, 2007: 199). Pinochet himself remained as Commander-in-Chief of the army until he retired from the post in 1998, becoming a lifelong senator. This meant that drastic change of the economic status quo was rendered impossible because of legislative constraints. The threat of further military intervention was also made explicit on a number of occasions, so governments have found themselves constrained in their decision-making processes.

This constraint has been nowhere more obvious than in the question of justice for crimes against humanity committed under the dictatorship. Patricio Aylwin campaigned on a platform of justice, and soon after assuming the presidency, designated the Rettig Commission to investigate the human rights abuses of Pinochet's regime. However, the language of power changed subtly to emphasise reconciliation rather than justice as a result of the truth-telling exercise of the Rettig Report, and critics such as Moulian point to the serious limitations of that report. The *Comisión* was certainly successful in giving name to and recognising the victims of the dictatorship. But it failed in two major ways: it was not the catalyst for judicial action against the perpetrators of crimes against humanity, and it addressed only those who died during the dictatorship, not those who were imprisoned and/or tortured. Furthermore, when the report was released, Aylwin 'pidió perdón, con lágrimas en los ojos, a nombre del Estado' (Moulian, 2002: 70). According to Moulian, this symbolic gesture through which the nation assumed responsibility for the crimes of the dictatorship was also 'un espectacular acto de evasión' (Ibid), since it represented the process by which individual responsibility for crimes committed was subsumed into collective responsibility (and therefore was made beyond punishment or reparation). It is worth noting that in more recent times, greater efforts have been made by the Chilean state with regard to processes of justice and reparations following the human rights abuses of the dictatorship. On this, see the introduction to Nagy-Zekmi and Leiva's *Democracy in Chile* in which the editors point out the dramatic events of 2004 and 2005 which made explicit to Chileans and to the world at large the extent to which the atrocities of the dictatorship had been covered up by official lies

and half-truths. In the first place, ‘On November 4, 2004, the Commander in Chief of the Army, General Juan Emilio Cheyre, formally acknowledged institutional responsibility for human rights violations’ (2005: 6). Additionally, the publication of the Valech Report that same year provided a record of some 38,000 Chileans who had been imprisoned and tortured under Pinochet’s regime, as well as making provisions for monetary reparations for victims and family members of victims. Then in 2005, several high ranking officials from *DINA* (the *Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional*) were sentenced for their role in the human rights violations that took place under dictatorship. However, the texts under study in this work all fall before these more recent developments, so their concern with the putative democracy in play nationally is located before this second-wave of transitional justice.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, the question of how to talk about, and even how to remember, the human rights crimes of the dictatorship becomes a key point of contention in discussions about democracy in Chile. Recent ethnographic works on the question of memory in Chile, including Lessie Jo Frazier’s *Salt in the Sand* (2007) and Steve Stern’s *Remembering Pinochet* (2004), focus on the dissonances between official narratives of memory and unofficial counter-memories. According to Frazier, the ‘eminence of the state in political culture has worked, in large part, through contests over national memory’ (2007: 250). In other words, hegemonic control remains dependent upon the particular way the past is narrated through memory. The state insists upon a narrative that first of all recognises the political problems of Allende’s government, thereby at least partially offering a justification for the subsequent military dictatorship. In the post-dictatorship period, the emphasis has been not on redress but on reconciliation. Attractive though the discursive employment of the term might appear, reconciliation significantly generates exclusion of certain bodies through the projection of a single national body unified by consensual forgiveness of past abuses. Reconciliation is precisely intended to protect the state and to ensure its survival, while discursively excising those (subjects and bodies) who do not fit its narrative:

Reconciliation as a state project therefore reenacts the nation-state’s tendency to promote a homogenizing subjectivity, that is, a unitary model of the national protagonist. Reconciliation glosses over the incommensurability of certain bodies and places, especially contested sites of violence, unreconciled ex-political prisoners, and unrepentant military officers. (Ibid: 197)

Reconciliation is therefore one additional feature of the consensus insisted upon by the post-dictatorship Chilean state in order to maintain the delicate balance of political and economic stability after national trauma. Its narrative functions through a deliberate concealment of the

fractures and abject remnants of dictatorship that remain so persistently present in the texts I have previously discussed. Frazier specifically associates the Chilean state's discursive employment of reconciliation with the perpetuation of the neoliberal state, arguing that 'it is a process that actually reanchors the state as arbiter of relations in the nation and market' (Ibid). In this process, the narrative of reconciliation functions as a force of social hierarchisation which entails 'the distribution of guilt and the delimiting of the past by negotiating who needed to heal and who would bear the guilt of the past' (Ibid: 207).

Steve Stern identifies a similar emphasis on national reconciliation and argues that by the turn of the century (his ethnographic present is the eve of Pinochet's arrest in London in 1998), Chile 'arrived at a culture of "memory impasse," more complex than a culture of oblivion' (2004: xxviii). This impasse was reached by virtue of four competing 'emblematic memories' of the dictatorship years, all struggling for public and national preeminence, yet paired in fundamentally opposing groups. Competing groups proposing counter-memories<sup>3</sup> – to contradict the narrative of the state – form what Stern terms 'memory knots', which he describes as follows:

Expressed theoretically: memory knots are sites of society, place, and time so bothersome, insistent, or conflictive that they move human beings, at least temporarily, beyond the *homo habitus* postulated by anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu. Expressed colloquially: memory knots are sites where the social body screams. (Ibid: 121)

My work here explores the ways in which the contestatory poetics developed by Lemebel, Zurita, Perlongher, and others supplement this production of counter-memories as explored by Frazier and Stern. The texts cited and discussed above work to tighten rather than smooth out the 'memory knots' identified by Stern in their shared insistence on the presence of wounded bodies that block the flows of neoliberal capitalism. The consensual democracy of post-dictatorship Chile is countered with a dissensus that is situated in alternative sensoriums to those permitted by hegemonic power.

The Argentine political and social reality surrounding dictatorship differs from that of Chile in three main ways. In the first place, in the years leading up to the military coup of

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<sup>3</sup> The term countermemory is employed by Frazier in the context of a discussion about the connection between memory and political hegemony. Frazier posits that the 'eminence of the state in political culture has worked, in large part, through contests over national memory. Official memory – memory generated, endorsed, and policed in the conflicts over consolidation of the state – was never fixed but always subject to and constitutive of hegemonic processes. In turn, projects for hegemonic control encountered counter-memories, which together with the official memory of any given moment formed part of the tussle for position in the formal political system' (2007: 250).

1976, the Argentine nation was characterised by a far higher level of political violence on both the right and the left than was imaginable in Chile. This created a very different climate for the onset of dictatorship, which proceeded without any of the display of military force explicit in the Chilean bombing of *La Moneda*. Secondly, while both dictatorships resorted to extreme forms of repressive violence in their attempts to eliminate ‘subversive’ elements, in Argentina, the death toll was far higher than in Chile. Both military regimes engaged in practices of abuse and torture, yet while in Argentina these almost always ended in the death of the detainee, in Chile, hundreds of thousands of torture victims were released back into society. Political and aesthetic engagements with the lingering scars of dictatorial violence therefore necessarily operate differently across the national borders. Finally, while in Chile a significant proportion of the population (44%) voted to maintain Pinochet’s regime in the 1988 National Plebiscite, in Argentina, the military drastically lost political support by the end of its rule. As a result, the constitutional and economic continuity that characterises the transition period in Chile is at the very least more muted in the Argentine context. The effects of this difference can be seen in the official response to the crimes of the dictatorship, with Argentina’s first post-dictatorship president Alfonsín pioneering trials and prosecutions of military leaders.<sup>4</sup> Yet the privileging of justice and accountability later foundered in a political culture of impunity, which prevented any further legal actions until impunity laws were overturned under the government of Néstor Kirchner (2003-2007).

In returning to the years preceding the dictatorship in Argentina, it is important to note that the political reality leading up to the brutal and repressive dictatorship of 1976-1983 is very different to the relative democratic stability of Chile. As Margaret Feitlowitz discusses in *A Lexicon of Terror*, ‘Argentine history is marked by recurring cycles of bloody rule’, and between 1930 and 1976, there were:

nine civilian-backed military coups, two other presidents appointed by the army, two blatantly rigged elections, and two terms of highly theatrical, quasi-fascistic Peronism. The average lifespan of these administrations was two years and ten months; one government in 1943 lasted but two days (2011: 5).

A recurring figure in this political instability was Juan Perón, a hugely contradictory and controversial figure, being a political magnet for both the extreme right and the extreme left.

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<sup>4</sup> It is worth noting that, while the leading generals of the military *juntas* were tried by civilian court in 1984, the military High Command had previously begun courts martial against General Galtieri and five other military commanders, accusing them of negligence in leading Argentina to defeat in the Falklands War (Brown, 2011: 259). The later civil trials were an attempt to seek tougher prison sentences that would take account of the civilian life lost under dictatorship in addition to the loss of military life during the Falklands War.

As an army officer, Perón first came to prominence as head of the Labour Department for the military government of 1943-46. Following strategic alliances with union groups and a broadening base of support stemming from his championing of urban workers' rights, Perón came to power in 1946 with a resounding 54% of the votes cast. His electoral popularity increased over the course of his presidency, and he was re-elected (having altered the Consitution in order to make this possible) in 1952 with 64% of the vote (Lewis, 2015: 95-104). However, the collapse of Perón's economic program later in 1952 and his subsequent failure to revitalise the economy, coupled with the severe blow to his personal popularity as a result of the death of his wife Evita in 1952, marked the beginnings of the disintegration of his power (Ibid: 105). In 1955, Perón was deposed by a coup, and forced into exile in Spain. The Peronist party was subsequently banned from standing in general elections. During the following twenty years, violence became a part of political life in Argentina.

In Chile, the threat of leftist violence was often appealed to by those who welcomed Pinochet's coup, yet in reality, extralegal actions by groups such as the MIR (*Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria*) were generally not violent, but rather focused on direct action. However, in Argentina, some factions of the Peronist party, as well as left-wing groups outside of Peronism, did engage in violent guerrilla action. Against the backdrop of escalating violence, and in spite of the military government's commitment to returning a civilian government, no democratic power structure was able to withstand the serious economic problems of the nation. The military assumed a heavily interventionist stance in the 1950s and 60s, and there were subsequent periods of short-lived democracy followed by coups in 1962 and 1966. From 1966, under the leadership of General Juan Carlos Onganía, civil violence escalated to unprecedented levels. Government-imposed wage freezes led to labour opposition as well as 'a shocking rise in political violence, such as clandestine torture and execution by the military government and kidnappings and assassinations by the revolutionary left' (Skidmore and Smith, 1997: 99). The government's repressive authoritarianism was met for the first time in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by counter-violence from the opposition, most notably the guerrilla group *Montoneros*<sup>5</sup> and the *Ejercito Revolucionario del Pueblo* (ERP), the military wing of the Trotskyist Revolutionary Workers' Party.

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<sup>5</sup> As Richard Gillespie points out, the *Montoneros* were able to occupy an ambiguous position that gave them widespread popularity owing to their combination of multiple ideological doctrines. As Gillespie describes, the *Montoneros* drew together 'radical Catholicism, nationalism, and Peronism into a populist expression of socialism' (2002: 377). The group was pragmatic in adopting alliances and, at least in the early years of their action, the majority of 'their actions were examples of "armed propaganda" rather than military operations' (Ibid: 380).



Argentina now found itself in a crisis situation, akin to civil war. In an attempt to stem the violence, in March 1973, the nation was permitted its first general election in ten years. Perón's stand-in Héctor Cámpora was elected, paving the way for the former to return to Argentina. Perón was famously met at Ezeiza airport by tens of thousands of supporters, at least 200 of whom were attacked and killed by Peronist Right-Wing Paramilitaries. After Cámpora resigned, Perón was elected to the presidency once more in September of 1973, however, this did nothing to stem the serious economic and political problems which took hold of the country in the 1970s. Far from controlling the violence gripping the nation, Perón began a process of violent repression of the revolutionary leftist branches of his own party. During this period, the right-wing paramilitary group *Alianza Anticomunista Argentina*, or *Triple A* was formed, under the secret leadership of Perón's own personal secretary José López Rega. The *Triple A* was responsible for large numbers of assassinations, primarily of members of *Montoneros* or the ERP, but the group additionally targeted a wide range of government opponents. When Perón died in 1974, his second wife Isabel took over the presidency, in spite of her almost total political impotence. These final years of democracy were, according to Feitlowitz, nominal only. The 'eradication of "subversive elements" was officially decreed', and the nation was plunged into economic chaos with massive inflation and unemployment, and political chaos with left- and right-wing paramilitary groups pitted against one another in armed struggle' (2011: 6). The coup, when it came on March 24, 1976, was welcomed by a large majority of Argentinians, and was presented as the restoration of much-needed order to a country in disarray (Ibid: 7), in marked contrast to the display of violent force implicit in the bombing of Chile's *Palacio de la Moneda* at the onset of Pinochet's dictatorship. Also unlike Chile, there was no single figure determined as the source of power in Argentina, with four successive military juntas forming the de-facto governments during the period known as the *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional*, or also the Dirty War.

In spite of its veneer of respectability and order, the Argentine dictatorship was arguably the most bloody and extreme in the history of the nation, creating a culture of terror that operated through disappearances, torture, and concentration camps. The journalist and newspaper editor Jacobo Timerman, who was imprisoned and tortured by the regime in 1977, wrote the famous *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number*, which is part memoir of his imprisonment and part historical account of the dictatorship. In this text, he describes how the 'chaotic, anarchistic, irrational terrorism of the Left and of Fascist death squads gave way to intrinsic, systemized, rationally planned terrorism' (1981: 26). Timerman describes the

military government as concerned primarily with the eradication of everything it considered damaging to the future Argentina it was attempting to create. This eradication was literally practised on the body of the citizens, with kidnappings, disappearances, and extrajudicial murder occurring on a huge scale:

Entire families disappeared. The bodies were covered with cement and thrown to the bottom of the river. The Plata River, the Paraná River. Sometimes the cement was badly applied, and corpses would wash up along the Argentine and Uruguayan coasts. [...]

The corpses were thrown into old cemeteries under existing graves. Never to be found. The corpses were heaved into the middle of the sea from helicopters.

The corpses were dismembered and burned.

Small children were turned over to grandparents when there was mercy. Or presented to childless families. Or sold to childless families. Or taken to Chile, Paraguay, Brazil, and given to childless families. (Ibid: 50-1)

The CONADEP (*Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas*) Report produced in 1984 in the immediate aftermath of dictatorship (like the Rettig Report in Chile) documents 8,960 persons disappeared during the Dirty War. However, as in the Chilean case, human rights organisations generally estimate the figure as much higher – up to 30,000 people.

The primary aims of the military government in redesigning Argentine society were the elimination of subversive elements and of terrorism, the imposition of traditional morals centred around the Christian, patriarchal family unit, and the rearrangement of labour relations. However, the military additionally undertook a typical neoliberal stabilisation programme for the economy (Skidmore and Smith, 1997: 105). Initially this succeeded in decreasing inflation, long a problem for the twentieth-century Argentine economy. However, by 1981, inflation ‘again exceeded 100 percent, and a recession set in’ (Ibid). In 1982, large antigovernment protests began to take place in the capital. By this point, the presidency had passed from General Jorge Videla and General Roberto Viola to General Leopoldo Galtieri. Galtieri made the mistake of attempting to validate his government with a claim to the Falkland Islands, under British sovereignty since 1833. Argentina believed that Britain would have no interest in defending the remote and sparsely populated islands, but they were wrong. Following Argentina’s invasion on April 2, 1982, Britain sent a major naval force to defend its territory, and Argentina was forced to surrender. An initial public expression of patriotism turned to intense antigovernment criticism. According to Skidmore and Smith, the ‘Galtieri-led junta had made a mortal error: as a military government it began a military adventure that it failed to win [...] Patriotic fervor turned into ugly demonstrations outside the Casa Rosada’

(Ibid: 107). Galtieri resigned, and was replaced by ‘an obscure retired general, Reynaldo Bignone’, who ‘promised an election in 1983 and a return to civilian government by 1984’ (Ibid). However, as in the case of Chile, the transition to democracy has been far from universally acknowledged as a success.

In terms of political and economic continuity between dictatorship and democracy, the conditions of the transition have ensured a different outcome than in the Chilean case. Whereas Pinochet’s regime was able to sustain significant control through constitutional delineations of the transition to democracy, in Argentina, the military government ceded power in the face of growing political and civil opposition. The terms of transition were therefore not pre-established. However, as Francesca Lessa points out, the military were able to take steps to prevent the onset of post-dictatorship justice processes:

The military did not achieve a negotiated exit, but nonetheless unilaterally imposed some non-negotiable conditions, including the September 1983 Law of National Pacification – a self-amnesty enacted for members of irregular armed groups and the armed forces, covering crimes committed between May 1973 and June 1982 – and Decree 2726/83, which ordered the destruction of all documents relating to the repression. (2013: 44-5)

As a result, as Feitlowitz establishes, the shift to democracy in Argentina ‘has been fraught with conflicts over how, when, to what degree, and to what end the workings of the Dirty War should be investigated and disclosed’ (2011: ix). The first elected president after dictatorship, Raúl Alfonsín, pledged in his electoral campaign to undertake inquiries into the atrocities committed by the regime, and to act upon the results of these investigations. Shortly after his election, he instituted CONADEP, which published the famous *Nunca Más* report in 1984. However, ‘preoccupied by the dangers of a military backlash’,<sup>6</sup> he finally brought to trial only those at the very top of the command chain, issuing in February 1984 the *Ley de Obediencia Debida* which allowed impunity to all but the highest commanders (Ibid: X). Although the resulting trials were few in number, the nine ex-commanders of the first three juntas were brought to trial, and five imprisoned, with General Videla and Admiral Massera receiving life sentences.

This marked a significant point in transitional justice, as Lessa points out, since previously in Argentina as in Latin America at large, ‘impunity had traditionally been the norm’ (2013: 52). Notwithstanding such a significant and unprecedented political

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<sup>6</sup> And with good reason, according to Feitlowitz, given that since the coup of 1930, ‘No president – civilian or military – has managed to stay in office against the wishes of the men in uniform’ (2011: 5).

achievement, under a subsequent law (the *Punto Final*) instituted by Alfonsín in 1986, at least in part in response to threats of further military intervention, all trials for crimes against humanity were suspended. Furthermore, those men who had been sentenced previously were later pardoned by the subsequent president, Carlos Menem (1989-1999). This was in part an attempt to pacify the military, but also, as Ana Ros points out, Menem's 'interest in reconciliation was closely linked to the neoliberal turn he envisioned for the country, since political stability was key for attracting foreign investment' (2012: 20). Menem's implementation of neoliberal politics – in spite of his political affiliation with Peronism – was a continuation of the economic system implemented under dictatorship, as in the case of Chile. However, unlike in Chile, Argentina has been far from an economic success story. The economy has suffered serious problems since the middle of the twentieth century, and in 2001, there was a massive economic and institutional crisis. Coming in the wake of Menem's neoliberal reforms of the 1990s, the consequences of the crisis – 'unemployment, poverty, and hunger – were understood as the very problems that the 1970s activists had been fighting against, linking the struggles of the past and the present' (Ibid: 21). So both the political situation (the turn towards impunity) and the economic situation (the shift towards increasing neoliberalism) demonstrate the extent to which Argentina had been unable to transcend its dictatorial past under democracy. Feitlowitz describes how, as a result of its maintenance of a culture of impunity, Argentina finds itself in the untenable situation in which it has not been so uncommon for 'survivors [... to meet] their torturers on the street, in the subway, in the buildings where they live' (2011: 4). It was not until 2005 (under the presidency of Nestor Kirchner) that the Supreme Court overturned the laws implemented by Alfonsín and further trials and prosecutions have been able to occur in Argentina.

Notwithstanding these clear problems, Argentina has been significant in the Latin American post-dictatorship context for its pioneering creation of multiple public fora for the discussion of the dictatorship. As a result, the political and aesthetic production of memory narratives on dictatorship and on the transition to democracy have been extensive. The public controversy over forms of memory and memorialisation has also been extensive. As Ros discusses, the political violence on both sides in the years leading up to the dictatorship has had a profound effect on the way politics is perceived in contemporary Argentine culture. Alfonsín's initial response to terror was to adhere to what has subsequently been described as the 'two demons' narrative: this 'blames the tragic events [of the coup and dirty war] on the leaders of the two groups [the guerrillas and the military] and presents society as a passive victim of their violence, foreign to their extremist ideologies' (2012: 16). The ramifications

of this narrative are apparent in the fact that not only were nine junta heads placed on trial by Alfonsín's government, but also seven guerrilla leaders. Similarly, this same narrative was emphasised in the prologue to the *Nunca Más* (CONADEP) report which begins by stating that 'During the 1970s, Argentina was torn by terror from *both the extreme right and the far left*' (1984, my emphasis).

Human rights organizations making claims for memory, truth, and justice – such as the iconic *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* – took as their focus the *desaparecidos* and attempted to distance them from the discursive constructions of political violence at both ends of the spectrum. As a result, the *desaparecidos* have been largely depoliticised within the public sphere and presented as innocent victims, thereby occluding their own political activism. In other words, while Argentina has been successful, especially in comparison with the other countries of the Southern Cone, in making visible certain forms of memory, this inevitably involved the production of silence and oblivion as well as that of speech and memory. In this case, it is ironically politics itself that finds itself silenced at the moment of a supposed return to democracy.

### ***Democratic Dissensus***

It is clear, therefore, that to speak of democracy in the decades following dictatorship both in Argentina and Chile is problematic, both in terms of economic continuity, and of the democratic states' complicity with the violence of the preceding dictatorships. In the Chilean case, indeed, post-dictatorial democracy remained not only complicit with, but also structurally dependent upon, the constitutional arrangements that facilitated the implementation of neoliberal economic policies through violence. In both cases, the state has used a justification of political and economic stability as a pretext for a lack of rupture with the previous repressive regimes. The democracy that is founded in this consensual silencing, and in neoliberal economic management rather than genuine political engagement, is subject to numerous critiques in the cases of both Argentina and Chile, as detailed above. Significantly, the aesthetic critique of limited democracy I locate within the texts studied as part of this work is driven by a desire to radicalise the democratisation processes that were only superficially carried out in the 1990s. I find that while the authors under investigation in this work are often vocal in their critiques of the problems of liberal democracy, their political aesthetic continues to attempt to function in a radically democratic way. Indeed, it is

by calling for a new understanding of the aesthetic as an intrinsically political (democratic) category that they strive to articulate an alternative to liberal distortions of democracy. While scrutinising the origins and operations of (neo)liberal democracy, these texts simultaneously interrogate the category of the politically committed text, expressing a new-found faith in the aesthetic itself as a potential expression of democracy. In this, I argue that they are committed to an alternative conception of the democratic ideal: one in which democracy is radically aligned, indeed made synonymous, with dissensus.

In identifying this connecting thread linking a disparate group of authors and texts, an alignment with the ideal of democracy outlined by French philosopher Jacques Rancière became apparent, particularly as the latter makes such dissensus central to his articulation of democracy. I aim in this work to practice the dissensual expression of equality that I seek to identify in the texts under analysis. In other words, I do not wish this production to be my theoretical imposition upon the literary and artistic expressions I investigate, but rather aim to allow the texts to speak for themselves, and the coincidences with theoretical visions to arise organically through discussions and juxtapositions. However, there has inevitably been a selection of a corpus for this work, and it would be disingenuous to disavow the input as author I have had on the structuring process. In addition, while I wish to avoid top-down theoretical solipsism, in this introductory section, it is useful briefly to consider this principal theoretical position that has influenced my readings, both with regard to the links between aesthetics and politics, and with regard to expositions of radical democracy.

In his text *Disagreement*, Rancière outlines the contemporary political environment as one in which consensual democracy is understood as having triumphed over totalitarianism. This triumph is ‘the victory of democracy (understood as a political regime, a system of institutions causing popular sovereignty to materialize) over its adversary, proof that such a regime is both the most just and the most effective’ (1999: 95). In Rancière’s terms, however, consensus democracy is a paradoxical juxtaposition of terms, since genuine democracy requires disruption or dissensus. Democracy is the dissensual struggle between what Rancière calls ‘the police’ – which he identifies with everything that naturalises the communal distribution of the sensible according to which social parts and roles are assigned a hierarchical ‘proper place’ in any social order – and ‘politics’ – which he identifies with moments when the assertion of that fundamentally democratic axiom of equality opposes any order of social classification and identification. In other words, it is a conflict over two distinct sensible partitions, two modes of being-together. The first kind (the police) is that which:

puts bodies in their place and their role according to their ‘properties’, according to their name or their lack of a name, the ‘logical’ or ‘phonic’ nature of the sounds that come out of their mouths. The principle of this kind of being-together is simple: it gives to each the part that is his due according to the evidence of what he is. Ways of being, ways of doing, and ways of saying – or not saying – precisely reflect each person’s due. (Ibid: 27)

The alternative partition (politics) is ‘the logic that disrupts this harmony through the mere fact of achieving the contingency of the equality, neither arithmetical nor geometric, of any speaking beings whatsoever’ (Ibid: 28). Dissensual democracy – which is essentially synonymous with politics in Rancière’s terminology – is the disruption of any ordering of bodies that operates according to an unspoken assumption of hierarchies in the name of the absolute equality of all speaking beings. It enacts a dissensual relationship with the police distribution of roles and parts. This hierarchical distribution – the police – repeatedly performs the *wrong* that masks this fundamental equality. In addition, democracy or politics, perhaps confusingly, can only occur momentarily, fleetingly, and intermittently.<sup>7</sup> Politics is the interruption of the status quo, but whatever occurs in its wake necessarily returns to the police (albeit possibly expressing a hierarchy of a different order).

Rancière conceives of three clear mechanisms that must be in place in order for genuine politics or democracy to occur:

There is democracy if there is a specific sphere where the people appear. There is democracy if there are specific political performers who are neither agents of the state apparatus nor parts of society, if there are groups that displace identities as far as parts of the state or of society go. Lastly, there is democracy if there is a dispute conducted by a nonidentary subject on the stage where the people emerge. (1999: 100)

The first condition for democracy, then, is the creation of a space for the appearance of the people or *demos* – a group of subjects (traditionally the proletariat or in some accounts, the ‘subaltern’) who, against a dominant logic, affirm their absolute equality with all speaking beings. In this action, the *demos* contests the original wrong (*tort*) that established it as a part with no part (the *sans part*) within the police distribution of roles and parts. Importantly, this

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<sup>7</sup> This conception of the political as existing only in a series of transgressive ‘moments’ has drawn the critique of Slavoj Žižek, who, writing in *The Ticklish Subject* argues that Rancière’s politics tends towards the marginalist, ‘accepting the logic of momentary outbursts of an impossible radical politicization that contains the seeds of its own failure and has to recede in the face of the existing Order’ (2000: 232).

appearance is not an ‘illusion that is opposed to the real. It is the introduction of a visible into the field of experience, which then modifies the regime of the visible’ (1999: 99). In other words, it is the *exposition* of the irrepressible equality of all, which is obscured by any hierarchical form of social organisation (in Rancière’s term, the ‘police’ order). The second is the collective identity formed by the particular process of disidentification with any police order, a disidentificatory process that Rancière calls ‘subjectivation’.<sup>8</sup> Subjectivation is the formation of the *demos* as a particular kind of identity in conflict. The (dis)identification of the *demos* as a collectivity is specifically not an identification with any previously conditioned ethnic or sociological group (workers, women, blacks, etc.). Rather, subjectivation through (dis)identification is ‘the designation of subjects that do not coincide with the parties of the state or of society, floating subjects that deregulate all representation of place and portions’ (Ibid: 99-100). All people are necessarily equal, yet the precise organisation of the social is founded in hierarchy.

The *demos* exposes this contradiction at the heart of community and therefore emerges in a space of dispute, dissensus, or conflict relating to the organisation of the social. And it is this necessary and unending conflict over the ‘count’ or classification of parts within society that represents the third mechanism of democracy. The very presence of the *demos* interrupts the order of domination since it demonstrates the wrong on which police domination is founded.<sup>9</sup> For Rancière, the wrong is impossible to undo, since it is not a moral judgement, or a politics of victimhood, but rather the expression of the fundamental miscount that attempts to occlude the absolute equality of all people. The wrong ‘institutes a singular universal, a polemical universal, by tying the presentation of equality, as the part of those who have no part, to the conflict between parts of society’ (Ibid: 39). The endlessly dissensual process of political subjectivation (the affirmation by the *sans-part* of their

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<sup>8</sup> As Samuel A. Chambers (2013) points out, as with various terms translated into English from Rancière’s work, there has been some confusion over the correct term to use for the original concept. In Rancière’s own French texts, he uses only *subjectivation*, a term earlier employed by Foucault (and differentiated by the latter from *assujettissement*). In Foucault’s work in translation, *subjectivation* is generally rendered as ‘subjectivation’, which *assujettissement* is rendered as ‘subjectification’. However, in the translation of *Disagreement*, Rancière’s term is rendered as ‘subjectification’, which is problematic since this is equivalent to the translation of Foucault’s *assujettissement*. To further complicate matters, when Rancière addresses the question of subjectivation in an English-language essay (‘Politics, Identification, Subjectivization’, 1991), he introduces the alternative term, ‘subjectivization’, but without any indication that this is different in concept from the French *subjectivation*. In line with Chambers, and bearing in mind Rancière’s consistent definition of the term, I use the more straightforward translation of ‘subjectivation’. However, where citations from Rancière’s texts in translation or in English use either ‘subjectification’ or ‘subjectivization’, I leave the terms as in the original document, but with the implicit understanding that the difference is owing to a terminological confusion rather than a differentiation of meaning.

<sup>9</sup> Rancière understands wrong (*le tort*, or *blaberon*) as ‘the constitutive wrong or torsion of politics as such’, that is, as the foundation of classificatory orders that disavow the fundamental equality of all beings (1999: 13).



equality) exposes the illogic that allows inherent equality to coexist with practical inequality. It performs the paradox that is the contradictory logic underlying our social system and in doing so, expresses genuine democracy.

This is the point at which Rancière's political thought rescues itself from the practical pessimism of which it is often accused. While it is true that the 'persistence of the wrong is infinite because verification of equality is infinite and the resistance of any police order to such verification is a matter of principle', this does not mean that there is no hope for a progressive shift in the social order. Because 'though the wrong cannot be regulated, this does not mean that it cannot be processed. It is not the same as inexorable war or irredeemable debt' (1999: 39). Political subjectivation is the ground through which the partition of the sensible governing the existing social structure can be altered. 'Political subjectification redefines the field of experience that gave to each their identity with their lot. It decomposes and recomposes the relationships between the ways of *doing*, of *being*, and of *saying* that define the perceptible organization of the community' (Ibid: 40). The radical democracy that Rancière seeks to outline, therefore, is contingent upon building relationships that are fluid and shifting, and building a community that endlessly engages in a conflictual relationship with the wrong at its foundation. And, as I explain in further detail below, this is specifically and emphatically an *aesthetic* restructuring of the social, since it is concerned precisely with the ways in which subjects perceive and experience their own reality. The texts I study as part of this work all undertake a reframing of established political accounts of the limits of democratisation in Argentina and Chile. In their dissensual contestations not only of the violence of dictatorship but also of restricted democracy, they broadly function within a Rancièrian political paradigm since they are all concerned with the dissensual distribution of bodies, and with the challenge to exclusions that limit who can speak and be heard. Significantly, I argue that they also operate within a Rancièrian aesthetic paradigm such that they allow us to recontextualise standard or well-known art-historical accounts of how those limitations have been approached in art and literature.

### ***The Politics of the Aesthetic***

In the case of both Argentina and Chile, the category of the aesthetic is confronted with two principal (and interrelated) challenges in the period of the post-dictatorship. In the first place, the primary aesthetico-political response to dictatorial trauma was an attempt at

rescuing memory through the testimonial genre. I referred earlier to Avelar's critique of testimony as being founded simultaneously in the discursive logic of dictatorship, and in the submission of the aesthetic to the political. Avelar is one of many critics who question the value optimistically ascribed to testimonial texts, as I discuss in detail below. While it has been lauded for its democratic and egalitarian tendencies, I argue that where testimony reigns, the aesthetic disappears into pure (antipolitical) didacticism. In the second place, the aesthetic gestures of the pre-dictatorial avant-gardes, which attempted to bring about the possibility for the aesthetic to intervene in the political sphere, have largely been assumed into the hegemony of the global marketplace under neoliberalism (and neopopulism in the case of Argentina). Critics in both countries (as well as internationally) have expressed concern about the possibility of an aesthetic interrogation of the dominance of the market in the light of the latter's remarkable ability to consume, recycle, and reinvent discourses that purport to challenge it into a blandly acceptable vision of tolerance for pluralism (but not for the more political category of radical difference). This dual problematic of the political aesthetic in the post-dictatorship period is the context for the appearance of the texts under study in this work, and the way in which they nevertheless continue to conceive of the aesthetic as a radically democratic category.

In the early years of dictatorship in both Argentina and Chile, censorship, repression, and widespread exile meant that cultural production and criticism virtually ground to a halt. At the same time, both regimes recognised and capitalised on the power of the mass media, with the rise of 'a stereotypical and paralyzing mass media culture geared toward larger sectors of the population' and embodied in the cultural dominance of television (Avelar, 1999: 47). In Chile, both 'popular and avant-garde' artistic production was 'ghettoized and forced to confront not only repression and censorship but also tight financial constraints in a context dominated by market-driven values' (Ibid). This ghettoization continues to impact on the way in which culture is produced and analysed in the post-dictatorship period in Chile, most notably in the reflections on the significance of the margin as politically-charged locus of opposition in the work of Nelly Richard and other critics. In Argentina, after the hosting of the world cup in 1978, there was a slight cultural and political opening and as Jon Beasley-Murray describes, notable Argentine intellectual Beatriz Sarlo used this opportunity to found the journal *Punto de Vista*. Even in the context of marginally increased freedom for cultural production, the contributors to the journal took the precaution of writing under pseudonyms, and 'the journal had to subordinate politics to aesthetics, or rather to approach politics obliquely, through a rereading of the Argentine literary canon and cultural history' (2001,

xv). This shift, while in one sense politically necessary, was also in part a response to Sarlo's earlier work in the cultural journal *Los Libros*, which she edited together with Carlos Altamirano, Ricardo Piglia, and Josefina Ludmer. The *Libros* group worked in association with the *Partido Comunista Revolucionario* and the *Vanguardia Comunista*, and Beasley-Murray notes that 'Sarlo now writes about this period as something of a political and theoretical dead end, particularly insofar as aesthetics (and questions of cultural form) came to be subordinated absolutely to politics (and the question of reproducing the correct ideological line)' (Ibid). This return to the aesthetic paradigm under dictatorship, therefore, speaks not only to the severe limitations of censorship, but also to a recognition that the occlusion of the aesthetic in cultural texts serves ultimately to depoliticise, rather than to privilege politics.

However, in the context of the dictatorial emptying of the public sphere for the expression of politics, it is perhaps unsurprising that the explicitly political (and even anti-aesthetic) text assumed a position of dominance in the cultural production of the post-dictatorship period (and, in the case of Chile, in the period immediately prior to the end of the dictatorship), as exemplified in the pre-eminence of the testimonial work. In both Argentina and Chile, as discussed above, national-official attempts at coming to terms with the violent remainders of dictatorship included the swift production of a testimonial report detailing its atrocities (the Rettig Report in Chile, and the *Nunca Más* report in Argentina). These two documents assumed a quasi-legal status: the *Nunca Más* report formed the basis for the limited trials that were undertaken in Argentina's transition period, while the Rettig Report essentially substituted for a judiciary response in Chile, affirming an imagined narrative of justice while the state limited itself to actions based on the principle of reconciliation. In both cases, the state took control of these testimonies of dictatorship – the reports were commissioned by the state, and the decisions and actions taken as a result of the witness contained within have been at the discretion of the state. Beyond these official reports, however, in both Chile and Argentina, testimonial texts that increasingly work to blur the boundaries between the political and the aesthetic have been produced. Texts such as Jacobo Timerman's *Preso sin Nombre* (1980), or Luz Arce's controversial *El Infierno* (1993) offer first-hand accounts of torture, which are certainly valuable in promoting an understanding of the realities of political abuses committed under dictatorship. At the same time, cultural production in both countries worked to privilege texts that were not precisely witness testimonies, but that nevertheless operated within a similar testimonial aesthetic paradigm.

This shift to the testimonial was part of a broader movement across Latin America in

the latter part of the twentieth century, in both cultural production and its analysis, away from the category of the aesthetic. Particularly in consideration of traumatic political events, as Francine Masiello points out in *The Art of Transition*, there is usually ‘an insistence upon eyewitness accounts and testimonial values, usually to the exclusion of the aesthetic’ (2001: 6). Jean Franco, writing in *Decline and Fall of the Lettered City*, relates a similar development in her discussion of the *Nunca Más* report in Argentina, which, she says, is of particular interest for the insights it provides into the possibility of documenting horror. Distilled from over 50,000 pages of victim evidence and testimony, the report evidences the difficulty of describing trauma through language. As Franco writes, the victims ‘grope for a language that eludes them, so that their narrative of horror is often banal’ (2002: 242). Franco suggests therefore that literature that attempts to engage with trauma finds itself obliged to tread a fine line in order to avoid succumbing to either banality or sensationalism, particularly since the market always risks appropriating the affective recounting of horror and turning it into a kind of pornography to be consumed and to titillate (Ibid: 243). This locates art and literature in a problematic position with regard to both politics and representation since, in Masiello’s terms ‘in these circumstances, in which personal pain confronts the test of art, art suddenly appears to be the enemy of truth, the violation of authenticity and singular experience, a traitor to the ethical values with which one might read the past’ (2001: 6). As such, as an alternative to the aesthetic production of horror, the testimonial text was initially surrounded by a significant academic euphoria (see, for instance, John Beverley in ‘The Margin at the Center’, or George Yúdice in ‘*Testimonio* and Postmodernism’). The testimonial text was hailed as being democratic, egalitarian, and as bearing traces of a real that fiction could never hope to approach. However, this early optimism has given way in more recent times to an awareness of the problems implicit in the uncritical incorporation of the testimonial genre into the literary canon. The narrative form that was once celebrated as transgressive and marginal has now become sanctioned by the very academy it putatively stood against. According to Georg M. Gugelberger, this is a shift that is inevitable under capitalism, which functions precisely by rendering safe that which threatens it: ‘What appears salvational is all too soon turned into a monument’ (1996: 3). Gugelberger’s argument here links the two interrelated challenges facing the aesthetic in the post-dictatorship period which I identified above: namely, the collapse of the aesthetic into the political and the effect of dominance of the neoliberal marketplace on aesthetic production.

Under the terms of the neoliberal marketplace, not only is the aesthetic paradigm of the testimonial text subject to critique, but also the notion of the production of memory (or at

least, a certain kind of memory) itself has come under critical fire. As Argentine writer Luisa Valenzuela points out, in the context of (post)modernity, the term ‘memory’ itself ‘runs the risk of becoming a mere label or an empty signifier into which everything fits, so nothing has value. True value, not mere exchange value’ (2011: ix). The argument for memory walks a fine line between two chasms: on one side is the official call to oblivion – the argument that attempts to protect a fragile democracy from a damaging reflection on past trauma; and on the other, there is the memory market – ‘those who seek to profit in one way or another from others’ pain and the morbid curiosity of some audiences’ (Ibid). Nelly Richard, writing from the Chilean perspective in *Crítica de la memoria*, points to a similar problem. On the one hand, official discourses present a limited memory account aimed at normalising a consensual foundation for politics – this official memorialization (that of the museum, the memorial park, the truth report) ‘buscó apaciguar el recuerdo, obliterando las luchas de sentido y las batallas de interpretación que debían mantener vivo al pasado en discordia’ (2010: 17). On the other hand, anti-dictatorial efforts idealised and emblematised the category of victimhood, ‘levantando una totalización identitaria que no admite desencajes del libreto político-ideológico que sostiene heroicamente su compromiso con la monumentalidad del recuerdo combatiente’ (Ibid: 19). For Richard, therefore, memory in the post-dictatorship period is open to serious compromise, and this is extended and expanded by its association with testimonial texts that work within a simplistic paradigm of denouncing atrocity from the standpoint of the victim. However, she points to the possibility for a rescuing of memory when it is approached as a category of the aesthetic. Memory, in Richard’s terms, contains within it a disruptive power that functions in a similar way to the disruptive power she elsewhere attributes to language. As she describes, in the post-dictatorship period, the dual pressures of the military government and the ‘fervor protestatario’ of the human rights movement generated a specific form of memory production that was founded in activism aimed at achieving judicial results. Because truth and precision were so crucial to this process, the aesthetic was essentially excluded from memory making, yet for Richard, the aesthetic is precisely the category:

que despliega una oblicuidad de juegos de lenguajes capaces de descentrar las catalogaciones sociales, históricas y políticas más ortodoxas, reestilizando como virtud lo que ellas rechazan como defecto: lo irregular de las fallas de textura y de los vacíos de representación que nos hacen saber que ningún relato debe mantenerse autocentrado en la falsa pretensión de verdades enteras, de significados totales y finales. (Ibid: 20)

Where memory can avoid the traps of testimony and situate itself in a similarly oppositional position as the ‘insubordinate sign’ she elsewhere attributes to aesthetic language, it may be able to emancipate itself from the logic of the neoliberal marketplace through its capacity for a dense signification that remains impenetrable to the simplifying discourses of power.

The above-described crisis of memory and testimony is combined in the post-dictatorship period in Chile and Argentina with a crisis about the thinking of the category of the aesthetic itself. Critics such as Argentine Néstor García Canclini point to the ways in which the aesthetic has become inseparable from the marketplace under modernity. According to García Canclini, modernisation relocates both popular and elite aesthetic production alongside a new reference to massified cultural production. Writing in *Hybrid Cultures*, García Canclini argues that in modern times, both popular and elite art can only be understood via their relationship with various institutions:

The work of the artist and that of the artisan approximate each other when each one feels that the specific symbolic order in which it is nourished is redefined by the logic of the market. Less and less can they remove themselves from modern information and iconography, from the disenchantment of their self-centered worlds and from the reenchantment that is favored by the spectacularization of the media. (1995: 5)

What is undermined above all is the claim of either sphere – popular or elite art – to autonomy. In practical terms, this is because the insertion of the market imposes extra-aesthetic conditions for art’s development; in particular, art becomes a highly lucrative site of investment. The art market now conforms to a single, international narrative, structured by a commercial network of the principal museums and galleries which present a unique historical recounting of the development of artistic movements: ‘The autonomy of the cultural fields is not dissolved in the global laws of capitalism, but it *is* subordinated to them with unprecedented ties’ (Ibid: 37). And yet in García Canclini’s terms, this shift should not be the cause of widespread pessimism. Rather, the ‘traditional and the modern are mixed’ in ‘sociocultural hybrids’ which he argues do not simply represent an appropriation of cultural images by the marketplace, but rather of a two-way process of hybridization.

It is certainly the case that this new cultural dependency on the neoliberal institution provides a more complex vision of the place of the aesthetic. However, García Canclini argues that neither elite nor popular culture is damaged beyond repair by this new relationship. ‘The cultured, in the traditional sense, is not eliminated by the industrialization of symbolic goods. More books and larger editions are published now than in any previous period’ (Ibid: 4-5). As for popular culture, it is certainly changing, but not in danger of

extinction, since folkloric products ‘maintain traditional functions (provide work for indigenous people and peasants) and develop other modern ones: they attract tourists and urban consumers who find signs of distinction in folkloric goods and personalized references that industrialized goods do not offer’ (Ibid: 5). García Canclini’s analysis is valuable for the ways in which it refuses to consign the production of popular culture to the past – avoiding the traps of what Johannes Fabian terms the ‘denial of coevalness’ (2004: 31). Yet, in its consideration of the aesthetic as being related solely (or at least primarily) to the institution, it fails to identify the uniquely political thrust I identify as belonging to the aesthetic, namely its capacity to disturb categories through its equation with the Rancièrian category of sensible distribution. As I go on to discuss, it also fails to identify the uniqueness of the aesthetic that resides in its ability to unsettle *all* other categories.

Writing in *Scenes from Postmodern Life*, Beatriz Sarlo is highly sceptical about the argument *pace* García Canclini, which is founded in what she describes as the ‘sociology of culture’ – in other words, concerned with art as it relates to institutions. Sarlo recognises that under the predominance of the postmodern culture industry in Argentina, publishing is at an all time high, as is cinematic production, and access to cultural products has never been wider. However, she queries the democratic and egalitarian thrust that is therefore ascribed to cultural production while it is at the same time linked to the global marketplace. There can be no doubt, according to Sarlo’s argument, that the neoliberal market impacts on the way in which art is conceived and received in the postmodern period. Aesthetics, the author asserts, has lost its traditional political or philosophical foundation under neoliberalism. This is because the marketplace has completed the work of desacralisation that the avant-garde initiated: ‘There is now no god, extrinsic or intrinsic to the space of art, to impart the sacred book that would lay out the values to be found in art’ (2001: 128). In considerations of the aesthetic, according to Sarlo, relativism now reigns supreme. In other words, the aesthetic as a sphere of judgement, founded in questions of value and taste, has now been made redundant:

When democracy takes over the sphere of art, it also institutes pluralism as the principle by which to regulate differences between distinct positions. This pluralism ensures the postulate of universal equivalence that could be expressed as the idea that ‘all styles seem more or less equivalent and equally (un)important’. Nobody can be condemned for their ideas about aesthetics, but then nor will anybody have the tools allowing them to compare, discuss, or confirm aesthetic differences. The market, well versed in abstract equivalents, welcomes this aesthetic pluralism as the ideology that most suits its needs. (Ibid)

Of course, the democracy that is thus ascribed to aesthetics in the era of cultural production is a false (or neoliberal) democracy, in which equality is conceived as pluralism. Aesthetics is thus emptied of its political potential since everything is equal, but only insofar as it is equally devoid of politics (conceived by Sarlo as value judgement).

There can be no doubt that neoliberal postmodernism operates in direct opposition to the earlier avant-garde, which was founded in the notion of artists and intellectuals being an aesthetic vanguard, leading the less expert people to make 'correct' value judgements. Under postmodernism, and in particular as a result of the explosion of the mass communications media, 'the audience has not only expanded, but also has gained autonomy from more traditional institutions, which were controlled by experts who saw their role in terms of educating taste' (2001: 135). Yet while this trend can be read in terms of democracy, anti-hierarchisation, and levelling, this is not to say that Sarlo accepts these postmodern trends with an uncritical eye. Rather, because they take place within the context of the globalised free market, the culture industry perpetuates 'an antiegalitarianism based upon the concentration of economic power' (Ibid: 136). The decline in the authority of artists and intellectuals does not leave a non-hierarchical power void. Rather, power is redistributed in the hands of the managers of the culture industry. As Sarlo points out, '*The cultural market does not set the stage for a community of free consumers and producers*' (Ibid: 136, emphasis in original). There is a discursive dissonance at play here: the market claims to enact a principle of egalitarianism while in reality, enacting a new series of hierarchies, all the more pernicious because of their occluded nature. However, Sarlo refuses to reject aesthetic production that occurs under the conditions of postmodernity and neoliberalism. While it is all but impossible to raise the questions of aesthetic value under the dominance of the marketplace, she argues that 'a strong stand that might make the argument over value possible once more could bring the aesthetic act's dense signification (the densest of contemporary society's significations) out into the open for many people' (Ibid: 139). Art and the aesthetic paradigm continue to be necessary because of their ability to look beyond the surface of political pragmatism, and to create 'a moment of semantic and formal intensity' not found in other cultural forms. Art, for Sarlo, 'offers an experience of limits': while other cultural expressions subordinated to the market 'all insist on avoiding even the idea of death [...], art stages this limit' (Ibid: 161). In other words, where the aesthetic is insistently adhered to, it makes possible a moment that is conceived by the marketplace as inequality (resistance to pluralism), but which is actually a dissensual marker of difference and limits, and is therefore an expression of the political.



Discussing the neoliberal context for aesthetic production in Chile, Brett Levinson arrives at a similar conclusion about the value of art which arises from its 'semantic and formal density' (see Sarlo, above). As Levinson argues in 'Dictatorship and Overexposure', aesthetic production founded in the revelatory (testimonial texts), risks unwittingly repeating the depoliticising aims of the neoliberal power structures that dominate the Chilean transition to democracy. According to Levinson, the contemporary neoliberal state in Chile is dependent not upon forgetting the horrors of dictatorship as is frequently critically posited, but upon remembering them fearfully:

However bad the market, it goes without saying that it is better than dictatorship. The freedom of the free market, even if problematic, thereby surely represents a movement in the right direction. This is one of neoliberalism's main marketing pitches – a pitch, rather, almost in need of no marketing since the point that it wants to convey is an issue of common sense, a result of a consensus that requires no negotiation or language. Again, it goes without saying. (2003: 104)

It is this 'goes without saying' that for Levinson is critical in considering the aesthetico-political response to the emptying of ideology that characterises the consensus government. He cites Moulian's claim to combine the social sciences with aesthetics in *Chile actual*. Moulian writes that 'La aproximación al lenguaje poético, a través de tropos que denominaré genéricamente metáforas, es indispensable para mi proyecto' (2002: 17). This is because, he argues, only aesthetic language can attempt a re-creation of the ways in which the transition and the dictatorship are simultaneously politically the same, and yet qualitatively different. 'El lenguaje tradicional de la sociología no alcanza para hacer "comprensible" esa odisea de creación y de crueldad, de innovación y de castigo' (Ibid: 20). Poetic language is the only possible way to approach a re-invigoration of the political in the face of the ideologically empty power structure that is the neoliberal state, according to Levinson. 'Poetry, as Moulián understands it, is precisely language or *Saying* that precludes the world from slipping entirely into the reign of a common sense that goes *without saying*' (2003: 106-7). The key, for Levinson, is to split apart the 'is' that declares that the transition 'is' democratic, in and through the aesthetic realm. It is only in the poetic that the limits of language to discuss dictatorship, transition, memory, and the political can be broached. Therefore the political aesthetic, for Levinson, is the testimonial that assumes that language (or the aesthetic) is itself political: 'Testimony, if it is not just testimony to the market, another commodity, must testify not to the history of the "Other" qua victim or "lost voice," but to this Saying, to language itself' (Ibid: 116). This is the way in which testimony can still point to the limits of

the neoliberal market. And this is itself a political act, since without belief in those limits, political apathy prevails.

The political aesthetic that Levinson locates in testimony can no longer be supposed to be in the mere fact of exposure. This is because the mass mediated reality of neoliberal government is reliant upon the endless exposure of the new. Consensus, according to Levinson:

operates by overexposing, over and over, the already identified, accepted, and seen. This overexposure, because difficult to comprehend (like an overexposed photo) generates the illusion that there is a hidden truth underneath publication, a missing space that the oppressed or voiceless might come to occupy, and that certain testimony might reveal. But overexposure, in fact, places all before the eye; there is no 'underneath' of the overexposed. It does not hide but blurs the scene as it relates over and over, upon a single place without depth, the Same. (2003: 117)

Instead of an aesthetic focus on *seeing* as the ultimate political act, the aesthetic focus, in Levinson's terms, must be on *reading*. Aesthetic language contains a unique possibility not for expanding knowledge per se, but rather for initiating a re-thinking of the way in which the structures of dominance rely on marking the boundaries between what can be thought, spoken, and heard. Aesthetics makes the un-thinkable thinkable, the un-sayable sayable. It expands the boundaries of what can be politically conceived, and while, according to Levinson, '*es muy poco*', it is 'nonetheless the horizon of possibility' (Ibid: 98).

The texts studied as part of this work all appear at a time when the political aesthetic works primarily according to a revelatory paradigm (in other words, in the final years of dictatorship and in the decade following the end of dictatorship). At the same time, the aesthetic is treated with scepticism in the light of the apparent ability of the marketplace to assimilate even the most radically oppositional text into its hegemonic narrative. However, I argue that the texts under study here work more closely within the aesthetic paradigm variously described by Levinson, Sarlo, and Richard, in which the aesthetic *is itself* the political expression. The politics in the texts I study here is not only located in considerations of dictatorship and memory (although unsurprisingly both feature significantly). It is found in the marking of fractures, limits, and excesses. It calls for a conception of language and aesthetics *as* the political sphere, a political that refuses boundaries, and that is founded in a sensorium of the body, of the wound, and of contamination and contagion between people. Language and the aesthetic paradigm disorder and disrupt, and in this way they point to the limits of the global dominance of the neoliberal free market. This focus on the aesthetic as

*itself* the moment of politics marks another point of resonance between the texts under study in this work and the aesthetico-political theory of Jacques Rancière. For Rancière writing in *The Politics of Aesthetics* (2008 [2004]), politics and aesthetics operate unequivocally within the same field since both are concerned with the ‘partition of the sensible’ (*le partage du sensible*).<sup>10</sup>

This key term in Rancière’s thought refers to the structures which govern inclusion and exclusion of the processes of sensory perception so that established modalities of perception implicitly limit categories of what may be seen, heard, spoken, and thought. Political revolution and aesthetic revolution both manifest themselves as a reconfiguration of this sensible distribution such that the supposedly natural status quo is shown to be contingent upon the structures which maintain the hierarchies of the ‘police order’. If the domain of the real is experienced sensibly, the issue is not to question whether ideology and aesthetics are mutually pervasive, but rather to determine how the aesthetic can become political, as opposed to being co-opted for the continued hegemony of the police order. Instead of indulging in new ways of proving the (non-)autonomy of the work of art, it is necessary to consider how aesthetic emancipation, founded in the presupposition of equality of intellect, can be used as a tool of democratic politics. The political effect of an artwork is by no means linked to intentionality on the part of the author: art is not political only because of what it says, but also because of the way it performatively challenges distinctions of inclusion and exclusion, and the hierarchies which structure both the political and the aesthetic distribution of the sensible. This sensible reconfiguration is, for Rancière, the moment of politics, or democracy. A similar association of the aesthetic with the political is strongly present in the texts under study in this work, as will be seen in the analysis which follows.

### ***A Plan of the Work***

In this project, I follow the tripartite mechanism for democracy established by

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<sup>10</sup> Rancière’s original ‘*partage du sensible*’ is variously translated as ‘distribution of the sensible’, ‘division of the sensible’, and ‘partition of the sensible’. I choose to use the latter term, since it reflects not only the implicit division which Rancière identifies at the heart of the political community (see *Disagreement*), but also the conception that this divided community is comprised of a number of miscounted parties or *parts*. As I explain later in this work, it is this miscount of parts that permits the dissensual political moment in which the conflict between actual inequality and the inalienable equality underlying community can be perceived.

Rancière in *Disagreement*, in order to trace examples of the aesthetic production of radical democracy (expressed as division or dissensus) within the texts under investigation. I broadly identify three areas as being key focuses in the exploration of both political and aesthetic democracy, and these three areas resonate with the three chapters of this work.

In Chapter I, I examine the first of Rancière's prerequisites for the appearance of politics: namely the creation of a 'specific sphere where the people appear'. I discuss the production of a relationship between the political and the aesthetic under dictatorship, framed primarily through an examination of the work of CADA, the *Colectivo de Acciones de Arte*. CADA's membership comprised visual artists Lotty Rosenfeld and Juan Castillo, writers Diamela Eltit and Raúl Zurita, and sociologist Fernando Balcells. The *Colectivo* undertook a number of performative artworks in Chile between 1979 and 1985 (in other words firmly during dictatorship) and their explicit aims were dual: to counter the violent oppression of Pinochet's regime, and to alter the institutional parameters of art. In other words, the artists were concerned with the ways in which the people were allowed to appear and speak, and the (public) spaces available for voices that opposed dictatorship. The group worked to privilege non-traditional forms for art, to investigate alternative canvases which attempted to democratise the transmission of the artwork, and to apply a conceptual framework which made possible multiple interpretations of the text. To begin this work with CADA may seem contrary to its aims, since I am primarily concerned with the question of the aesthetic production of radical democracy which acts as a foil to a neoliberal pseudo-democracy, rather than with democracy as a replacement for repressive dictatorship. However, CADA provides a vital starting point in an assessment of contemporary thinking about aesthetics and politics because of the way in which the group, as part of the theoretically impactful *avanzada* (the Chilean neo-avant-garde), both challenges, and may at the same time reinforce, avant-garde thinking about the relationship between aesthetics and politics, and the implications of this relationship for a broader commitment of the artwork to democracy. In contrast to Nelly Richard's influential position that differentiates the *avanzada* from the historical avant-garde, citing the former's commitment to the maintenance of fragmentation and marginality, I argue that CADA's members themselves often worked within an avant-garde paradigm. This repetition of the earlier paradigm is symptomatic of a lack of connection with the historical genesis of the neo-avant-garde by artists working within the *escena de avanzada* in Chile. As such, I work in this chapter to delineate the points of intersection between the historical avant-garde and the *avanzada*, and discuss the problems these aesthetic repetitions cause to CADA's stated aims of advancing a radical democracy through the artwork. However, I

additionally identify the ways in which the group's projects pointed the way towards new juxtapositions of the political and the aesthetic. CADA's concern with corporality, and specifically with the creation of bodily wholeness, while certainly in part symptomatic of a return to an avant-garde thinking about the relationship between the political and the aesthetic, is also a dramatic means of wresting corporality from power, ideology, and state interpellation. Rather than insisting on a biopolitics founded in the thanatotic drive of endless fragmentation, CADA's focus on the erotic breaks with the biopolitical distribution of subjectivity instituted by the dictatorship, and instead asserts subjectivity as a consequence of a claim to equality that is founded in the body.

Chapter II focuses on disidentitarian modes of identification, linking this concept with queer theoretical perspectives ('groups that displace identities as far as parts of the state or of society go'). This chapter takes as its focus texts by Pedro Lemebel (Chile) and Néstor Perlongher (Argentina), authors often considered part of a canon of queer Latin American literature. Lemebel and Perlongher enact the dissensual in numerous ways in their work. In the first place, their texts counter the political left's exclusion of certain facets of social experience, most notably homosexuality and transgenderism. Secondly, they challenge the neoliberal privatisation of all spheres in their focus on a relationality founded in an intense (and often intensely sexualised) corporality. The post-dictatorial political void is here challenged and filled with a series of alternative visions for a democracy that is founded in sexual contact, contagion, and the encounter between Self and Other that serves to blur the boundaries between the two. Thirdly, through an engagement with processes of disidentificatory subjectivation, their work counters the residual identificatory drive in queer theoretical perspectives, particularly those formed in the academy. In spite of the frequently explicit expressions of sex and sexuality in their work, this latter tendency paradoxically functions to unlink the queer from sex in ways that highlight how 'queer' distributions can have broader economic, political, and social ramifications that extend beyond the specificity of sexual difference. In other words, the contrasting of the significance identity (or rather disidentity) assumes for these two authors, read in conjunction with the Rancièrian mistrust of any classificatory impulse, gestures towards a possibility that 'queer' writing might be envisaged as political beyond preoccupations with any of the residual identitarianism that is implicit in a unique focus on the sexual, and as 'queer' beyond the academy, since both writers heavily focus their texts in the urban reality of the *calle*. And finally, while this chapter still operates broadly within a Rancièrian theoretical framework, the queer focus of the texts allows a movement towards an expansion of the category of the 'partition of the

sensible', largely reserved by Rancière for the political and the aesthetic, to include also the sexual. In so doing, it productively complicates these former categories in a rejection of theoretical purism, which itself approximates the Rancièrian theoretical position of supplementarity, contamination, and a limitless queering of boundaries.

Chapter III examines the final political mechanism of dissensus ('a dispute conducted by a nonidentary subject') in a consideration of the poetry of Raúl Zurita (Chile) and Juan Gelman (Argentina), each of whom published both during and after dictatorship in their respective countries. I focus on the way in which each writer considers traumatic memory to be related to political change rather than to continuity, and the challenge that their poetry poses to the notion of forgetful consensus as being imperative to peaceful democracy. The incorporation into this work of an analysis of poetry is highly significant to its broader aims. Regardless of the political aims of the poets under study, the consideration of the aesthetic specificity of poetry itself is salient, since it is traditionally considered the most autonomous of the literary art forms, and is characterised frequently by its interpretative inscrutability (in other words, it is often associated with an aesthetic dimension that is set apart from the political). This, in itself, precipitates a discussion about aesthetic autonomy and politics, which is crucial to the performance of the new relationships between the two that I seek to identify. In a challenge to the way in which poetry has frequently been separated by critics into political and 'high' art, Gelman and Zurita remain committed both to poetic accounts of trauma and violence, and to an expressive opacity characterised by fragmentation, division, and rupture. In other words, they retain a clear political commitment to truth-telling, while also insisting upon a continued valorisation of poetry as aesthetic object. This commitment to the fragment is manifest not only in an ethical refusal to ignore or forget a traumatic past, but also in both poets' resistance to the idea of future wholeness upon which the voice of consensus politics in both Chile and Argentina insists. Gelman and Zurita's work can (and has been, as I discuss in further detail below), therefore, be read in terms of a melancholic resistance to the present. According to this reading, the poetry works to counter the limited memorialisation permitted by the neoliberal transition to democracy, and to mourn the failure of the direct avant-garde association of the aesthetic with the political. However, this commitment to fragmentation and to the resistance of wholeness is, I argue, more than merely a melancholic insistence that a traumatic past be recognised by an amnesiac present. It is itself a political project envisaging the possibility of an – albeit partial and compromised – vision of community. This chapter explores the resonances between these two poetic oeuvres and Jean-Luc Nancy's concept of the 'inoperative community', which is founded in the

meaningful meaningfulness of death (finitude) and the consequent awareness of the absolute relationality of being. I contend that this relationality underwriting community permits Gelman and Zurita to propose a poetic vision of equality founded in the simultaneous maintenance of the being-between – the you *and* I – and the recognition of the necessity of communication across that border – being-together.

## **I.**

### **Democratic Spaces:**

#### **CADA and the Re-Emergence of the Avant-Garde**



*There is democracy if there is a specific sphere where the people appear.*

Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement*

### ***Introduction: Fragmentation and Synthesis***

On October 3, 1979, the Chilean art collective CADA<sup>11</sup> carried out its first *acción* – an aesthetic intervention into the public spaces of the brutal political regime of Pinochet’s dictatorship. Entitled *Para no morir de hambre en el arte*, this *acción* comprised multiple simultaneous aesthetic engagements with the urban environment of Santiago. First, in the neighbourhood of La Granja, the artists of CADA handed out 100 bags of milk to 100 families, with the request that the empty bags be returned for use in future collaborative artistic projects. CADA had printed each bag of milk with the words *½ litro de leche* recalling Salvador Allende’s promise to allocate this amount daily to every child in Chile, and therefore also the utopian idealism of his *Unidad Popular* government. The group recorded this handing out of the milk on video and in photographs. On the same day, CADA arranged for an accompanying page to be printed in *Hoy* magazine (No. 115, 3<sup>rd</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> October 1979). Originally the group had wanted the page to be entirely blank except for the name CADA, but the editor refused to do this. Instead, the magazine printed the following poem:

Imaginar esta página completamente blanca.

Imaginar esta página blanca  
accediendo a todos los rincones de Chile  
como la leche diaria a consumir.

Imaginar cada rincón de Chile  
privado del consumo diario de leche  
como páginas blancas por llenar.

After the ceremony of the milk, CADA read a text entitled *No es una aldea* in front of CEPAL (*Comisión Económica para América Latina*), the UN building in Santiago. The group recorded the text in the five languages of the UN Charter (English, Spanish, French, Chinese, and Russian),<sup>12</sup> and versions were also read outside UN buildings in Bogotá and Toronto, thereby working to create a global context for the dictatorial situation in Chile. *No*

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<sup>11</sup> The *Colectivo de Acciones de Arte*, whose membership comprised visual artists Lotty Rosenfeld and Juan Castillo, writers Diamela Eltit and Raúl Zurita, and sociologist Fernando Balcells.

<sup>12</sup> This was prior to the addition of Arabic as an official language of the UN in 1980.

*es una aldea* combined a pessimistic description of contemporary Chilean reality with an expression of hope for a better future. Finally, in the *Galería de Arte Centro Imagen*, CADA exhibited an acrylic box containing 60 bags of milk, a copy of the page in *Hoy*, and an audio recording of the reading of *No es una aldea*. The milk was left and allowed to decay in the acrylic box, on which were printed the following words:

PARA PERMANECER COMO EL NEGATIVO DE UN CUERPO CARENTE, INVERTIDO Y PLURAL.

This irruption onto the scene of aesthetic protest tells us a great deal about the politics of CADA's aesthetics. On the one hand, the group displays an attitude to the political aesthetic that is problematic in its re-inscription of an avant-garde paradigm for understanding the relationship between politics and aesthetics. However, the specific details of CADA'S aesthetic efforts to give expression to the political also marks the beginning of a very new, and wholly democratic way of thinking this relationship.

In the first place, this *acción* is significant for its paradoxical relationship with fragmentation and synthesis. The *acción* explicitly links the onset of dictatorship with the loss of both collective and individual wholeness: the population is envisaged as literally fragmenting as a result of the new lack of social provision caused by Pinochet's wholehearted implementation of the neoliberal policies outlined by the Chicago school of economics. Written references to the body 'privado', to the empty page, and to the 'cuerpo carente' make this link clear. In her 2000 text *Emergencias*, Diamela Eltit argues that the economic policies of the dictatorship in Chile were fuelled both by overt and excessive violence against the individual body as well as by more subtle biopolitical repressions of the body politic: 'Se trataba de recuperar la concentración de los bienes a costa de la exacerbación del cuerpo – especialmente de los cuerpos populares – empujados al límite de la carencia, abusados en impresionantes sesiones de tortura, en inacabables humillaciones mentales' (2000: 23). This biopolitical repression in the service of economic development was justified by the military regime using a binary rhetoric in which the good citizen (envisaged as the self) was juxtaposed with a horrific but unspecified other. The excision of those parts of the body politic damaging to the health of the whole was given as explication for the violence – the disappearances, torture, and murder – of dictatorship. CADA's performative action is thus partially designed to highlight this fragmentation of the social body post-coup. In other words, the political effect of the aesthetic is at least partly premised on the act of revelation, or of demonstrating the brutality at the heart of the dictatorial status quo.

According to Chilean-based theorist Nelly Richard, CADA is part of the aesthetic movement she terms the *avanzada* (or Chilean neo-avant-garde).<sup>13</sup> Other artists associated with the movement include Carlos Leppe, Eugenio Dittborn, Juan Castillo, and Carlos Altamirano. Writing in *The Insubordination of Signs*, Richard explains that the project of neo-avant-garde art is similar to that of traditional militant leftist art; however, rather than focusing on explicit denunciation and protest in an attempt at consciousness-raising, the *avanzada* functions through ruptures of language and linearity, and through the privileging of aesthetic innovation as a means to symbolically create fissures in the fabric of hegemonic control. Richard pre-empts the critique of *avanzada* art that argues that its focus on aesthetic rupture created works that were problematically opaque and therefore elitist, ‘presupposing a reader who was not only complicit but also expert in transcodifying maneuvers’ (2004b: 47). In other words, this argument asserts, the semantic density of the *avanzada* perpetuates rather than dismantles social hierarchies. However, according to Richard, this flight to semantic opacity and density ensures that the neo-avant-garde remained at the margins of aesthetic production, a feature she identifies as being essential to politically oppositional art, since the margin was a ‘zone from which resonated questions of how territorial demarcations of symbolic power operate’ (Ibid: 48). As a result, the *avanzada* was notable for its determination to retain a principled formal fragmentation as a means to ensure its permanent liminality. Writing earlier in ‘Margenes e Instituciones’, Richard contends that this new fragmentary aesthetic developed as a result of the particularity of the Chilean social and political context. The military coup effectuated a historical rupture so profound as to disrupt any sense of narrative coherence for Chileans, leading to a (literally and temporally) fractured body politic requiring an address from a similarly fractured subjectivity. Furthermore, the demands of censorship (and consequent self-censorship) required an art form that could evade the scrutiny of power through its manifest uninterpretability and seeming ideological opacity.

The search for a new form of expression was not occasioned merely by this need, but also by a generalised mistrust of signs. Direct signification, as in pre-dictatorial days, was now impossible since not only was all communication suspected of complicity with power, but also all references to an intelligible reality had been ruptured by the coup, and the codes for comprehending reality no longer made sense: ‘Sólo la construcción de lo fragmentario (y

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<sup>13</sup> Richard emphasises her resolution to ‘mantener el término [...] en español para evitar las confusiones o malentendidos que implicarían las connotaciones nostálgicas de su traducción por “avant-garde”’ (1987: 13).

sus elipsis de una totalidad desunificada) logran dar cuenta del estado de dislocación en el que se encuentra la noción de sujeto que esos fragmentos retratan como unidad devenida irreconstituible' (1987: 2). Art, according to Richard, therefore came to play a very necessary social role: to reformulate a new body of signs, and to recommence communication, albeit a communication that constantly questioned itself, and that retained rupture and fragmentation at its core. In contrast to this neo-avant-garde aesthetic, the historical avant-garde had arisen in response to the 'division of languages and compartmentalization of spheres and values', which were understood as responsible 'for reinforcing the internal logic of each practice, forcing the foreclosure of self-referentiality' (2004b: 28). In other words, the historical avant-garde attempted to respond to fragmentation with synthesis, and it is here that Richard establishes a point of difference between the avant-garde and the *avanzada*. According to her analysis, the *avanzada* is concerned always with maintaining a position of fragmentation, seeking to expose and deepen fissures in the semiotic representations of reality in order better to expose similar fissures in political reality. Richard claims, therefore, that the art of the *avanzada* is intrinsically political in its 'insubordination of signs'. In its determined emphasis on the fragmented body (both literal body and body politic) CADA's *Para no morir de hambre* appears to fall within the aesthetic definition of a neo-avant-garde and, following Richard's argument, is thus demarcated as distinct from the historical avant-garde.

However, the performance described above does not end with a manifestation of fragmentation, but rather seeks to offer a solution founded in totality or wholeness. The milk in the art gallery is destined to remain 'hasta que nuestro pueblo acceda a sus consumos básicos de alimentos', and while the subjunctive mood ('aceda') refuses any definitive point of resolution, its possibility is nevertheless clearly introduced here. The goal of the artwork is explicit: to restore wholeness to the body politic through a future in which social inequality is undone. To further complicate the deliberate temporal anomaly introduced by the subjunctive mood, the solution proposed by CADA to inequality is nostalgically located in the past, as evidenced by the appeal to Salvador Allende's social policies (the 'medio litro de leche'). The drive to wholeness, then, is not as evident as the drive to fragmentation, yet it is nevertheless clearly present.

This concurrent desire both to fragment and to make whole is symptomatic of a drive I envisage in CADA's artistic production more broadly to transcend the aesthetic paradigm of the avant-garde, while simultaneously often repeating its problematic political mechanisms. Even where the texts and performances produced by the artists of CADA initially appear to manifest a commitment to fragmentation, as in the discursive emphasis on the fragmented

body politic in *Para no morir de hambre*, this is frequently compromised by an appeal to a renewed wholeness, here founded in the individual bodies comprising the body politic. This example of a return to an avant-garde paradigm of synthesis is, I submit, the result of a broader lack of connection with the historical genesis of the neo-avant-garde by artists working within the *escena de avanzada* in Chile. The first part of this chapter, therefore, works to demonstrate points of intersection between CADA's artistic output and its avant-garde theoretical predecessor. I propose that these intersections are problematic because of the assumptions about politics and aesthetics entrenched within the avant-garde position. The avant-garde, as I discuss below, while aiming to create new ways of linking the political and the aesthetic, actually tends to privilege the political at the expense of the aesthetic. In so doing, it creates an implicitly hierarchical arrangement of these two categories, which then extends into the creation of additional hierarchies (between the artist and the viewer, between the leader and the led, and so on). CADA's production, where it repeats the aesthetic prescriptions of avant-garde art, falls into the same traps, and in contradiction to the group's explicitly stated aims, the political effect of the artwork frequently works to reproduce the hierarchical paradigms it seeks to overcome.

Nevertheless, *Para no morir de hambre* also points to what CADA offers that is innovative and which, unlike the problematic avant-garde paradigm that often invades the group's discourse and practice, points to a new way of thinking about the political aesthetic. This new thinking is founded in equality and radical democracy, and is located in CADA's aesthetic concern with the body as biopolitical obstruction to power. In *Para no morir de hambre*, this emphasis on the body was linked in part with the (re)creation of wholeness and as such, as I have argued above, represented a return to the avant-garde privileging of political and aesthetic synthesis. Yet at the same time, CADA employed the group's focus on the body as a performative means of restoring to the body alternative significations than those permitted by ideology or by state control. The body became a life-affirming symbol, being founded in an erotic drive rather than in the thanatotic biopolitics of the military regime. For CADA, as will be seen, subjectivity itself is located in such affirmations of the erotic body. In the group's aesthetic production, therefore, the body is inherently equalising since shared corporality is the starting point for a new means of conceiving community. My re-reading of CADA in these terms draws significantly from Jacques Rancière's contestation of Louis Althusser's theory of the functioning of state interpellation through ideological apparatuses, and his alternative egalitarian shifting of power to the individual through the process of subjectivation, and will be explained in full below.

### *Re-Entrenchments of the Avant-Garde*

The Chilean *escena de avanzada* offers a vital opportunity for re-thinking the relationship between politics and aesthetics. However, its distance from the avant-garde paradigm is a matter of intense critical debate, most notably in the recent dispute between Chilean critics Nelly Richard and Willy Thayer.<sup>14</sup> In her text ‘Lo político y lo crítico en el arte’ (2011 [2004]), Richard stresses the distance between the Chilean *escena de avanzada* and the historical avant-garde, while at the same time acknowledging certain continuities between the two. In particular, she argues that her use of the term *avanzada* (rather than neo-avant-garde) functions to:

1) destacar lo precursor de un trabajo – batallante – con el arte y sobre el arte que, efectivamente, participaba del ánimo vanguardista de *experimentación formal* y de *politización de lo estético*; 2) tomar distancia con la epopeya modernista de la Vanguardia que internacionalizaba las historias del arte metropolitano, destacando la *especificidad de una escena de emergencia*. (2011: 15, emphasis in original)

In the first place, according to Richard, the *avanzada* does work according to a similar theoretical positioning as the historical avant-garde, in particular with regard to its political aesthetic and its formal innovation. However, she argues that it differs from its historical predecessor because it arises in response to a particular political and social reality, and as such its aesthetic project is wholly original. She posits the centrality of both the local and the marginal to the *avanzada*’s politics of aesthetic resistance, in contrast to the move towards universalism and internationalism that was a characteristic of the historical avant-garde, as well as focusing on the fragmentation and rupture she envisages as being central to the

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<sup>14</sup> The very existence of the *avanzada* as a coherent aesthetic movement is also the subject of debate, particularly considering the fact that the artists who were working within its framework, and working towards broadly similar political goals, sustained what can only be described as an at times hostile environment vis-à-vis each others’ aesthetic philosophies. Carlos Leppe, who had previously worked in an art collective with Richard, describes the critical pigeonholing undertaken by Richard and her counterparts which, he argues, impacted on his desire and ability to produce art: ‘Comencé a angustiarme con la nueva feria de entretenciones que exponía el arte y la política. Justo Mellado, en mi taller, me preguntó hace unos pocos días, el porqué me había silenciado del mundo del arte nacional, y le respondí: “la Richard y tú intentaban asaltarme cada día, me acorralaban en una esquina y pedían respuestas para cada uno de mis movimientos, y tú lo sabes bien.” Dejé de producir públicamente porque sabía que cada uno de los trabajos que hacía, antes que llegara a ser presentado, pasaba por la autopsia de las necesidades críticas, obsesivas y monotemáticas; el ambiente se movía en función de las batallas de discursos que proliferaban urgentes como comunicados de guerra’ (Cited in Thayer, 2004: 11). In a more dramatic vein, Robert Neustadt describes a scene of intense conflict between various creators of oppositional art under dictatorship in the instance of ‘una reunión que se hizo entre los tres grupos, el CADA, los del grupo de Richard, Altamirano, Leppe, Eugenio Dittborn, y el tercer grupo, que era de Francisco Brugnoli en el Taller de Artes Visuales. Hubo una reunión en que todos se sentaron a la mesa para resolver las diferencias y se terminaron diciendo unos a otros, “ustedes son unas conchas de sus madres”’ (2001: 94).

*avanzada* aesthetic (as described above). In sum, she argues that the differences between the historical avant-garde and the Chilean *avanzada* are greater than the continuities between the two.

However, this is by no means an uncontested theoretical position. Richard's above-cited essay appears in response to Willy Thayer's thesis, established initially in 'El Golpe como consumación de la Vanguardia' and further explored in 'Del aceite al collage' and 'Vanguardia, dictadura, representación'. In brief, Thayer establishes a parallel between the military coup of September 11, 1973 and the Chilean neo-avant-garde, seeing both as being characterised by the desire for the Event, and by extreme ruptures with the past. Specifically, in 'El Golpe como consumación', Thayer states that 'El Golpe de estado realizó la voluntad de acontecimiento, epítome de la vanguardia, y abrió la escena post-vanguardista en que ya no será posible corte significativo alguno. La escena post-vanguardista sólo posibilita rupturas insignificantes' (2002: 54). Not only, therefore, does Thayer suggest that there is a certain complicity between avant-garde aesthetics and the politics of the coup – because both function through an extreme rupture with the past and a violent fixation on novelty – but also he argues that a return to avant-garde aesthetic paradigms in the post-coup reality of Chile is not just politically ineffective, but also dangerous. In Thayer's vision, the Chilean coup created a state of exception which paved the way for the normalisation of globalised neoliberalism. Such a total system assimilates and even profits from critical contestations of its all-encompassing power (such as Richard's defence of the local and marginal as a source of counter-institutionality). The oppositional marginality and difference which, for Richard, is at the heart of her vision of *avanzada* resignification can always, Thayer argues, be reappropriated by dominant (and normalised) global neoliberal power.

For Thayer, the Chilean coup was analogous to the vanguard's desire for the Event – the moment of shock that produces an intense defamiliarisation. However, according to Richard, this straightforward association of the coup and the avant-garde is reductive since it works to discount 'el desvío de esta larga aventura de tensiones entre institución artística, exploración estética y transformación social que caracterizó a las vanguardias, devolviendo el término a su rúbrica de origen: la militar' (2011: 20). In other words, it ignores the crucial interplay between fields (social, aesthetic, political, institutional) that is at the heart of the avant-garde project. In contrast, the military coup is about totalisation: the historical narrative of the nation is wholeheartedly re-written, and the boundaries of representation are narrowly circumscribed and controlled. Notwithstanding such disagreement, Richard does acknowledge one existing link between the coup and the *avanzada*: namely, the violence of

their imposition of novelty and concomitant rupture with the past (in the case of the coup, with political history, and in the case of the *avanzada*, with aesthetic tradition). Yet, she argues that:

en el primer caso, el del golpe militar, lo Nuevo hace desaparecer todo un pasado nacional mientras que, en el segundo caso, la ‘ruptura de la Avanzada con la prehistoria nacional de arte’ se produce en el interior (demarcado) de una tradición cultural. (Ibid: 21)

In other words, the break effected by the military coup is total and irreparable, whereas the *avanzada* continues a contestatory dialogue with its artistic predecessors, and significantly lacks the drive to extermination practised by the authors of the coup. In addition to disagreeing with Thayer’s association of the avant-garde and the military coup, Richard argues that his linking of the two is problematic for the way in which it fixes the *Golpe* as a point of no return, after which critical or political art can never function in the same way. Richard thus accuses Thayer of fetishising the coup as ‘un *presente continuo*’, a sublime moment which cannot be transcended or even represented. While Thayer argues against the possibility of representation in the wake of the destruction of the representative paradigm by the military coup, Richard contends that the *avanzada* is precisely concerned with this question of representation in its attempts to ‘reestilizar los cortes y las fracturas de una temporalidad violenta mediante una sintaxis de lo disociado y lo inconexo, de lo no integrable’ (Ibid: 19). In other words, far from being a capitulation to the dictatorship’s wresting of control of representation, the fragmentation and marginality which *avanzada* artists insist upon is an attempt to open representation up to a more egalitarian paradigm in which alternative interpretations are possible. Indeed, it is precisely because the dictatorship violently dislocated signs from their previous meanings that the *avanzada* attempts a re-semiotization founded in the fragment. In contrast, Thayer argues that any aesthetic critique founded in representation, even a fragmentary representation, is open to appropriation by the all-consuming global neoliberal market.<sup>15</sup> So as Richard accuses Thayer of capitulation to the global neoliberal order, Thayer accuses Richard of complicity with its spread.

To sum up this critical conflict, Thayer argues that the coup and the artistic avant-garde have a troubling amount in common, and therefore, any attempt at a political aesthetic

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<sup>15</sup> As Jon Beasley-Murray notes, Thayer instead seeks a solution in a destructive performativity. He ‘wants to rescue something from the previous epoch: a “purely destructive critique, which neither conserved nor founded rights,” that he finds in “the popular practices of Salvador Allende’s Government” and its “*anasemic performance*, disjunctive, mute, unjudgemental”’ (2010: 278-9).



that is founded in these same avant-garde techniques risks a similar complicity with structures of power. On the other hand, Richard places the *avanzada* in a distinct position both with regard to the representative paradigms of the dictatorship and with regard to traditional militant (leftist) art. This difference is largely concerned with positionality (the marginal) and aesthetic practices (the insistence upon formal fragmentation). Unlike Thayer, I find instances in the work of CADA that demonstrate that the political potential of the aesthetic *qua* sensible distribution can continue to unsettle the neoliberal status quo and work with a genuinely democratic thrust. However, in line with Thayer's argumentation, I also document the instances where the *avanzada* (and specifically the art actions of CADA) does operate continuously with the historical tradition of the aesthetic avant-garde, emphasising the problematic nature of this association for the political effect of the artworks under study. I argue (in contention to Richard) that CADA cannot simply be seen as an artistic response to dictatorship arising from an aesthetic void. Rather, it must be considered as part of a broader contestation of the relationship between politics and aesthetics, as understood both in Latin America and in Western Europe and the US. CADA problematically performs these aesthetic reiterations without acknowledging the historical and cultural genesis of its forms and practices. In the first place, as discussed above, CADA tends to reduce an initial commitment to the fragment to a renewed avant-gardiste search for synthesis and totality. In the second place, in spite of the group's declaration of a desire to dissolve the divisions separating the aesthetic from the political, the use of extensive framing devices and heavy reliance upon the political manifesto demonstrate a lack of faith in the artwork as inherently political. And finally, CADA's vision of the artist at the vanguard of political progressivism tends to reproduce a didactic 'top-down' equality rather than allowing for a genuine distribution of equality of subjects.

### ***Divisions and Hierarchies***

CADA followed its first *acción*, *Para no morir de hambre* with *Inversión de escena* on October 17, 1979. This *acción* consisted in a parade of milk trucks (borrowed from the *Soprole* dairy company) which travelled in convoy to the *Museo de Bellas Artes* in Santiago and parked outside. The artists then organised the covering of the front entrance of the museum with a large white sheet. Robert Neustadt describes the way in which the group used deception to obtain the milk trucks (this was CADA's usual *modus operandi* for projects on

this scale). The director of *Soprole* had no idea of the political implications of the *acción*, and on discovering the use to which his trucks had been put, he attempted to buy the video tapes documenting the artistic intervention. When CADA refused to sell them, he changed the logo on his entire fleet of milk trucks in an attempt to dissociate himself from the group and their politicised performances. This patent fear of the possible repercussions resulting from an association with the artworks of CADA demonstrates all too clearly that this and other *acciones* did not occur in a politico-aesthetic void – in other words, that the artwork under dictatorship is considered to be far from autonomous or alienated from the social or political spheres.

With this *acción*, CADA intended to raise questions about the institutionalisation of the artwork, and the problems this raised for its transmission and reception by the public. In veiling the museum entrance, while the artwork-performance stood defiantly outside, its re-entry symbolically prohibited, the artists of CADA created a new space for the occurrence of art: the streets of the city. Concerns about who could access the artwork enshrined within the museum or art gallery were here undone since every passer-by not only could, but was obliged to, observe the *acción* taking place in front of them: the grand scale of the production made it very difficult to ignore. CADA therefore also offered a commentary on what was seen and unseen – on visibility and invisibility – in aesthetics and politics. Finally, the conjunction of the white sheet and the milk trucks (particularly in the context of the recent *Para no morir de hambre*) suggested a certain complicity between the art institution and the social politics of the dictatorship. Both the hallowed art gallery and the dominant political regime are conceived here as the grounds of power, with each being dependent upon the other. CADA thus performed a dual critique of a politics that operated on the basis of division: division between those who could access the museum and those who could not; and division between those who could afford *la leche diaria* and those who could not. Most importantly of all, the artists of CADA were attempting to dissolve the division between the political and the aesthetic. The political, for CADA, occurs in the aesthetic act itself. As the artists write in the manifesto-text accompanying and describing their first *acción*, the space political art occupies is life itself, and in occupying this space, art assumes the ability to alter life:

Proponemos entonces el arte como una práctica teórica de intervención en la vida concreta de Chile, lo que significa hacer de los modos y de las exigencias propias de la producción de vida, el antecedente orgánico, el soporte material y el lugar de consumo

final del trabajo de arte.<sup>16</sup>

According to CADA, the artwork operates politically by moving outside the constraining framework of the museum and into the street, away from the private and into the public sphere, and away from privilege and towards democracy. In other words, it works towards a recuperation of the increasingly fragmented, privatised public sphere. However, the question remains as to how successful this attempt to democratise the artwork has been. The supplementary relationship between art and life (implied by the instrumental meaning of ‘intervención’ that places art both as part of life and at the same time outside it) complexly functions both to maintain a distinction between the two in a repetition of the (failed) gesture of the historical avant-garde, and to render both categories ‘impure’ in what I shall later argue is a fundamentally democratic-dissensual moment.

*Inversión de escena* forms part of broader attempts by the group to rethink boundaries, both of the artwork and its institutional supports, and of the spaces it occupies. Here, as elsewhere, the *colectivo* focuses on fleeting temporality, on the bypassing of commercial or institutional circuits, and on the occupation of the city as a canvas. However, this creation of alternative canvases for the artwork is itself a repetition of a very typical avant-garde gesture: the attempt to remove art from the institutional and commercial dominance of the museum. In the seminal text *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Peter Bürger argues that this critical impulse of the avant-garde is what most clearly differentiates it from its aesthetic predecessors. According to Bürger, only after art had entered the avant-garde stage could it institute a self-criticism rather than a self-immanent criticism (criticism from within its own institution). In other words, art produced from within the avant-garde was able for the first time to criticise the institution of art itself, by which Bürger intends ‘the productive and distributive apparatus’, and ‘the ideas about art that prevail at a given time and that determine the reception of works’ (1984: 22). According to Bürger, the avant-garde was the first point at which artistic means and procedures were freed from the conventions of the particular historical style under which art was being produced. There is therefore no distinctive avant-garde style, but rather a universal availability of forms, including a multiplicity of new artistic forms never before seen. This universality of aesthetic form represents the most significant impact of the avant-garde on subsequent artistic production on a global scale.

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<sup>16</sup> This document, alongside many others, is archived in Robert Neustadt’s extremely thorough account of CADA’s production, *CADA día* (2001: 113).

In spite of this acknowledgement of the lasting influence of avant-garde art, and of a certain democratising dimension implicit in its formal innovation, Bürger's thesis is that its project has largely failed. The integration of art into the praxis of life 'has not occurred, and presumably cannot occur, in bourgeois society unless it be as a false sublation of autonomous art' (1984: 54). Nor has the avant-garde succeeded in dismantling the art institution. It was, however, successful in demonstrating the institutionalisation of art, 'and also revealed its (relative) inefficacy in bourgeois society' (Ibid: 57). This affects the way art after the avant-garde is understood and analysed, since art is no longer able to deny its own autonomy, which in turn permits a new mode of thinking about the long-standing dichotomy between aesthetic and engaged art. Bürger argues that the avant-garde permits a new political engagement through aesthetics since 'it enables political and nonpolitical motifs to exist side by side in a single work'. The facilitation of this co-habitation of the political and the non-political in the work 'does away with the old dichotomy between "pure" and "political" art' (Ibid: 91). The limiting factor in the political effect of avant-garde art lies in its failure to dismantle the institution of art, since it is this latter that determines the political reception of the individual work.

In Bürger's terms, this failure is most notable in the generalised capitulation of the aesthetic movement he terms the neo-avant-garde to the market. The neo-avant-garde is a designation coined by Bürger to describe the later avant-garde movements whose resurgence characterised post-war art in Western Europe and North America. According to Bürger, this period in art represents little more than an empty repetition of the historical avant-garde movements that furthermore inverts the critique of the original, commodifying the avant-garde and reifying it within the museum. As Bürger writes, since 'now the protest of the historical avant-garde against art as institution is accepted as *art*, the gesture of protest of the neo-avant-garde becomes inauthentic' (1984: 53, emphasis in original). In spite of the intentions of its producers, art as an institution has prevailed in the neo-avant-garde, and therefore any attempts to recreate the aims of the historical avant-garde movements 'institutionalizes the *avant-garde as art* and thus negates genuinely avant-gardiste intentions' (Ibid: 58). In the case of CADA, Bürger's critique ought perhaps to alert us less to the weakening of the avant-garde performative gesture than to the power of the market to absorb all challenges to its logic. However, it does successfully bring into question the possibility for the uniting of those (political and aesthetic) spheres which CADA so clearly desired to undertake, using techniques enshrined in the historical avant-garde, even after these techniques had been called into debate. Indeed, instead of uniting the two spheres, CADA's

attempt to integrate the praxis of aesthetics with that of politics tended to reassert the privilege of the latter at the expense of the former, thereby unintentionally creating further division between the two spheres. This occurred through the reinstatement both of a division of spheres (of the aesthetic and the political), and of a division of labour, as I go on to discuss in the following two sections.

### *The Division of Spheres*

*Inversión de escena* not only demonstrates a desire to distance the artwork from the institution, but it also aims to address the Chilean problem of restricted and unequal access to the artwork through a democratisation of art: CADA attempts literally to bring the artwork to the street and to the spectator. However, it is not clear that this automatically means that a radical democracy occurs in and through the artwork. In spite of the group's overt commitment to equality in its rejection of the institution and its devices for restricting access to the aesthetic, CADA frequently projects a re-inscription of the division between art and politics through a heavy reliance both on framing devices and on the manifesto. Both of these aesthetic characteristics work to convey a sense of separation between the aesthetic and the political which is contrary to their explicit aims of reducing the distance between the two. In both cases, the artists of CADA show themselves to be repeating the aspirations and problems of the avant-garde which similarly worked on the basis that aesthetics and politics could operate within the same sphere, but which has been critiqued for failing to move the artwork outside the institution or museum.

In the first place then, CADA insisted on an aesthetic framing for its political interventions. Indeed, the *colectivo*'s claim to inclusion within the domain of the aesthetic frequently depended upon this framing, which, it is true, often took innovative forms, such as the employment of the relatively technologically new form of video. CADA's first *acción*, *Para no morir* made dual use of this technology in its framing. As described above, the tape recording of the first part of the performance was exhibited in the art gallery (sealed in a transparent plastic box) along with the bags of milk. At the same time, this final part of the artistic intervention, in which members of the *colectivo* perform this entry into the gallery, was itself recorded on video-tape. The video shows a slow-paced recording of the careful sealing of the box, followed by a dialogic discussion between the members of CADA and the small audience present. The audience is asked to give their interpretations of the *acción*, and

then CADA leads a conversation about the linking of art, politics, and life. The video is grainy and clearly shot with a handheld camera.<sup>17</sup> Video footage of the following performance, *Inversión de escena*, is more professional in terms of sound and image quality, although it remains a clearly amateur production. It begins with footage from the *Soprole* factory, showing bags of milk being distributed into crates. Then the trucks are shown driving off in convoy in a long and uneventful sequence (over seven minutes passes before they arrive at the *Museo de Bellas Artes* and park the trucks outside). The filming of the raising of the white sheet is similarly slow – the video emphasises its ability to go ‘behind-the-scenes’ of the otherwise dramatic *acción*. Similarly, in the case of the following *acción ¡Ay Sudamérica!* (1981, described in detail below), the extensive filmed material, produced for a video installation, emphasises the laborious, mundane nature of the preparation for, and background to, the monumental *acción*. One video shows a repetitive track of manifesto leaflets being printed (over eight minutes of footage), with subsequent videos showing an abundance of images shot from one of the planes as it flies above Santiago. The emphasis in the latter video is on the landscape, both natural and urban, with sweeping aerial views of Santiago, shots of the other planes flying in formation, and lingering images of the snow-capped mountains, and the sky. Editing and camerawork underscore the connection CADA makes between the Chilean landscape and their artwork. In footage from CADA’s other *acciones* from 1981 and 1982, *El fulgor de la huelga* and *A la hora señalada* respectively, as in the previous video accompaniments to the original performances, the emphasis is overwhelmingly on the preparation to the aesthetic moment. This choice of material to be included is therefore noticeably supplemental to the work itself, a fact which, when considered alongside the supplemental relationship between art and life identified briefly above, creates a definitively political effect, which is discussed in full in the final section of this chapter. At the same time, however, I argue that the claim to a politically progressive aesthetic is here partially compromised owing to the framing implicit in these video accompaniments to the often fleeting and at times sparsely observed artistic performances.

The reliance on video technology in the creation of its works became an often repeated rationale for a criticism of CADA’s collective production. As Neustadt documents, CADA was unsurprisingly subject to critiques from the Right who attempted to discredit the movement as ‘una manifestación de “locos,” jóvenes que necesitaban aprender respeto para

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<sup>17</sup> The videos described here, as well as other richly detailed filmic source material on CADA and the group’s art *acciones*, can be found at the Hemispheric Institute Digital Video Library at <http://hidvl.nyu.edu>.

el orden' (2001: 13); from traditionalists, who argued that CADA's *acciones* had nothing to do with art; and from the Left, who critiqued the avant-garde hermeticism of the work, arguing that the group were 'elitistas por su costumbre de emplear nuevas tecnologías de la época como el video o el televisor', and that they exploitatively used 'pobladores pobres como parte de sus obras' (Ibid). Nonetheless, in interview with Neustadt, Juan Castillo cites the group's use of video in art as one of CADA's most lasting achievements, suggesting moreover that it opened up new spaces for art and thus was able to function to expand the boundaries of the sensible (to use a Rancièrian terminology) through its democratising of artistic forms:

Todos los artistas que empezaron a repensar en que un artista visual no es específicamente un pintor o un escultor sino que puede usar una computadora y/o puede usar un video etc. Esa situación que aparece tan mínima, después del CADA quedó abierta para cualquiera. (Ibid: 65)

This echoes CADA's own earlier defence of its new aesthetic production of video art ('La función del video'), which the *colectivo* artists distributed at the *Bienal de Video*, held in 1980 at the *Instituto Chileno-Francés de Cultura*. Far from being a limiting and exclusionary factor in their art, CADA explains in this document, the technology's potential for infinite re-use gives it a unique significance in a Latin American context in which the recycling of materials is a necessary aspect of life. Furthermore, in CADA's terms, the use of video is essential not only for documenting an art which by its performative nature is ineluctably transient, but also for creating a tangible model for the alternative reality which it is the project of their artworks to supply. The text describing this hope for the aesthetic value of video technology 'La función del video' is cited in Neustadt's work *CADA día*:

El video cumple para nuestro grupo una doble función: por una parte actúa como registro, es decir memoria o documental de una situación de arte efectuada en y sobre la realidad y por esto mismo, no documenta la realidad, sino una forma de realidad construída [sic] de antemano. (2001: 139)

However, this explanation, while well aligned with the avant-garde argument that the only valid goal for art lies in its project to alter socio-political reality, fails to respond to what is a more interesting question than whether the use of video expands access to the artwork: namely the implications of the process of technological framing for the conception of performance as aesthetic production rather than political action. Indeed, CADA's continued reliance upon technological framing techniques for the group's *acciones* displays not only a

lack of faith in the fleeting temporality deemed crucial to its aesthetic, but also a continued subordination of its work to institutionalised methods of determining the boundaries for the aesthetic. In other words, the framing which creates aesthetic practice and guarantees the work's categorisation as *work* is altered and updated but clearly not removed in the production of CADA's artworks.

The mistrust of the power of the aesthetic is further evidenced by the fact that (with the exception of *No +*), each of CADA's *acciones* was accompanied by at least one and often multiple manifesto-like texts. According to Martin Puchner, the manifesto is inseparable from the avant-garde as movement, being 'a genre that epitomises the utopian progressivism of the early twentieth century and thus everything that the postmodern present is not' (2006: 351). Nelly Richard expresses her disapproval of CADA's reliance on the manifesto which she disparagingly describes as being characterised by 'el tono – predominantemente zuritiano – de una proclama utópica que quería inscribir su fusión arte/vida en un horizonte de reintegración metafísico-revolucionario'.<sup>18</sup> Her critique here exemplifies some of the bitterness of the earlier heated encounters between the various protagonists of the *avanzada*. Yet a more productive critique could focus on the way in which the excessive reliance on the manifesto as technique for distributing a political message, ostensibly through the artwork, displays a far more counter-intentional subordination of the aesthetic domain to the political. For not only does it problematically reduce the aesthetic *to* the political in a manner that obliterates the desire, stated elsewhere, to maintain their essential mixity, but the extensive use of the manifesto is also intensely didactic. This belies the stated aim of CADA to produce an *oeuvre* that was deliberately complex in order both to remain inscrutable to power and to resist a facile interpretation. Balcells, the group's sociologist, wrote an article in *Análisis* entitled 'La separación de las aguas en el arte' in which he argued that:

las obras de mensaje inmediato, en las que se representaban escenas de dolor, de violencia y muerte... tienen en común con los mensajes socialmente dominantes (de la publicidad, por ejemplo) un carácter lineal, unívoco y autoritario. Son obras que no dejan lugar a la actividad reflexiva del espectador, que no le suscitan problemas ni posibilidades de diálogo. (2002: 20)

CADA's intention, therefore, was clearly to provoke dialogue rather than impose a monolithic discourse as a counter to the similarly univocal voice of the dictatorship. Notwithstanding such provocations, and in spite of the multiplicity of interpretations which

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<sup>18</sup> Richard, N. (1999). Dossier Cada 20 años, *Revista de Crítica Cultural* (19), cited in Neustadt, 2001, p. 171.



the group argues are possible because of their avant-garde hermeticism, CADA's work is frequently marked by a clear intentionality through the use of the manifesto. While it is true that the *colectivo* emphasised the participation of the spectator in the production of the artwork and in the ascription of meaning as vital to the political project of the group, its production of texts accompanying those artworks necessarily limits the possible breadth of meaning that could be applied. This once again operates to reduce the value placed in the category of the aesthetic, and to produce a politics of the artwork founded in didacticism and a division of spheres between the artist (who sees and knows the abuses of power and critiques them in his work) and the spectator (who is the recipient of this special seeing and knowing).

### ***The Division of Labour***

CADA's art, as I have described, is founded in the explicit (and frequently didactic) critique of power. However, at times, it fails to provoke a genuinely dissensual relationship with that power, because it remains founded in the previously described division of labour between artist and non-artist. Here, once again, CADA shows continuity, rather than a break, with the historical avant-garde, since it retains the latter's idea of the artist as privileged bearer of specialised knowledge. Such a belief has been present since the foundation of avant-garde aesthetics, and indeed since the first figurative use of the term 'avant-garde' in the writings of the mid-nineteenth-century utopian socialist, Henri de Saint-Simon. The feelings of universal harmony that Saint-Simon advocated in his political writings were to be instilled into the population through a new priesthood of artists who were figured as an elite group leading society from the vanguard. Saint-Simon extolled this newly politicised position for the artist:

What a most beautiful destiny for the arts, that of exercising over society a positive power, a true priestly function, and of marching forcefully in the van of all the intellectual faculties, in the epoch of their greatest development! This is the duty of artists, this their mission. (1825: 346-7)<sup>19</sup>

Saint-Simon's principle, which follows on from the post-Enlightenment aesthetic thought of Kant and Schiller, according to which art assumes a quasi-religious role in a secular society,

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<sup>19</sup> Cited in Donald Egbert, 'The idea of 'avant-garde' in art and politics' (1967: 343).

has dogged art ever since, particularly the avant-garde. Where aesthetics is a regulatory principle for society, art becomes hierarchical, establishing gaps between the leaders (artists) and the led (the masses), between those who know and understand politics, and those who cannot be expected to understand but only to feel. Saint-Simon here notably employs a combination of martial and spiritual motifs, in reference both to the military origins of the term ‘avant-garde’, as well as to the new direction he envisages for the avant-garde in the aesthetic realm. This co-optation of two apparently opposing images – the militaristic and the aesthetic – is echoed also in CADA’s work, especially in the *¡Ay Sudamérica!* action described below.

In Jacques Rancière’s terms, by contrast, the aesthetic can be inherently political, but only when it works to dissolve this (implicit or explicit) division of sensory labour. Rancière conceives of a formal politics of aesthetics, rather than a politics which arises from content. Art which is overtly political or critical is frequently problematic since it (unwittingly) often acts to reassert hierarchy and inequality. Critical art is undemocratic when it presupposes the incapacity of the people to distinguish the structures that oppress them. In *The Emancipated Spectator*, Rancière undertakes a critical assessment of the purveyors of ‘post-Marxist and post-Situationist wisdom’ which proposes a ‘disenchanted knowledge of the reign of the commodity and the spectacle, of the equivalence between everything and everything else and between everything and its own image’ (2009b: 32). Rancière identifies the work of Barthes, Baudrillard, and Debord as belonging to this critical approach, which claims futility and melancholy faced with the dual social domination of the commodity and the spectacle, and in so doing, reproduces the divisions of labour that structure a hierarchical society:

In effect, the producers of social critique have as their goal treating the incapable: those who do not know how to see, who do not understand the meaning of what they see, who do not know how to transform acquired knowledge into activist energy. (2009b: 47)

Even art which envisages politically progressive transformations can function to control and limit access to the echelons of society with the knowledge to produce and interpret images, incapacitating those whom it presupposes to be intellectually unequal.

Where it fails to provoke the equalising miscount of the democratic moment, critical art is unable to provoke a dissensual relationship with the police distribution of the sensible:

There is no straightforward road from the fact of looking at a spectacle to the fact of understanding the state of the world; no direct road from intellectual awareness to

political action. What occurs instead is a shift from a given sensible world to another sensible world that defines different capacities and incapacities, different forms of tolerance and intolerance. (2009b: 75)

In other words, mere visibilisation of oppression, injustice, or inequality cannot function to provoke genuine dissensus: we might look at something, but that does not mean our sensible perceptions will necessarily be altered. Indeed, the hierarchies that structure the (police) distribution of the sensible are often reinforced in the didactic artwork which functions through the division of labours, privileging the artist above all others.

The clearest example of the manner in which such hierarchical distributions of aesthetic labour return in CADA's avant-garde gestures can be found in the group's *acción* entitled *¡Ay Sudamérica!* On July 12, 1981, in an outstanding organisational feat, CADA engineered the dropping of 400,000 leaflets from six small aeroplanes over Santiago. This project had a dual aim. In the first place it was concerned with the spectacle of the *acción* itself. The planes as artwork invoke the sky as canvas,<sup>20</sup> part of CADA's broader project to democratise access to the aesthetic and to explore alternative methods for the creation and distribution of art. Neustadt argues that the visual effect of the planes and falling leaflets was an inclusionary one: 'La acción ocupó el cielo como soporte, e interpeló a la ciudadanía en masa tanto con la imagen visual del cielo intervenido con aviones y volantes, como con el texto que se publicó en los panfletos' (2001: 35). However, the use of planes, in particular after the aerial bombing of *La Moneda* in 1973, also created a problematically military appearance for the *acción*. Hernán Vidal argues in *Poética de la población marginal* that the sight of six planes flying over the city replicated the earlier attack, and was unlikely to cause a pleasing sense of artistic inclusion: 'Una escuadrilla de seis aviones toma aspecto de raid aéreo militar y no de aproximación amistosa'.<sup>21</sup> Whether the sight of the planes is more reminiscent of poetry or of military attack is a matter of interpretation. However, it remains the case that the collaborative effect Neustadt envisages arising from the *acción* is undermined by the physical positioning of the artists and spectators, with the artists literally above the heads of the recipients of their message, dispensing the artwork from on high. This hierarchical split was only reinforced by the content of the leaflets, which once again utilised the manifesto style of the avant-garde, invoking a univocal interpretation.

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<sup>20</sup> This use of the sky as artistic canvas is repeated by Raúl Zurita in 1982 in a solo art action entitled *La vida nueva* in which Zurita used an aeroplane to spell out a poetic sequence above the Puerto Rican districts of New York.

<sup>21</sup> H. Vidal, *Poética de la población marginal* p.136, cited in Neustadt (2001).

The manifesto text of the leaflet stated the aim of the *acción*, namely the avant-gardiste desire to achieve the fusion of art and life, understood here as the only possible ethical project for art. According to CADA, in order for art to achieve this aim, it had to become a truly collective project. The text appealed to the nation as a collective body united in diversity, and the spectator was made a participant through the use of direct address:

CUANDO USTED CAMINA ATRAVESANDO ESTOS LUGARES Y MIRA EL CIELO Y BAJO EL LAS CUMBRES NEVADAS RECONOCE EN ESTE SITIO EL ESPACIO DE NUESTRAS VIDAS: EL COLOR PIEL MORENA, ESTATURA Y LENGUA, PENSAMIENTO.  
Y ASI DISTRIBUIMOS NUESTRA ESTADIA Y NUESTROS DIVERSOS OFICIOS: SOMOS LO QUE SOMOS; HOMBRE DE LA CIUDAD Y DEL CAMPO, ANDINO EN LAS ALTURAS PERO SIEMPRE POBLANDO ESTOS PARAJES.

Neustadt argues that CADA's expression here does have a manifesto-like quality, but that it goes beyond the usual monolithic discourse of the manifesto since the artists of CADA also 'interpelan al lector de una manera que abre la acción a otro nivel' (2001: 33). It is true that the 'life space' which CADA attempts to construct is one in which the marginal and oppressed are encouraged to assume a central position. The address is made to the worker, and to those with 'piel morena', and the marginalised body is significantly placed at the centre of the aesthetic project as the anchoring force for a new kind of 'pensamiento'. In addition, the manifesto makes a clear effort to move outside the boundaries of the urban, and to include the entire nation in the construction of the artwork. CADA goes on to assert a universal artistry for the nation:

POR ESO HOY PROPONEMOS PARA CADA HOMBRE UN TRABAJO EN LA FELICIDAD, QUE POR OTRA PARTE ES LA UNICA GRAN ASPIRACIÓN, COLECTIVA / SU UNICO DESGARRO / UN TRABAJO EN LA FELICIDAD, ESO ES.  
'NOSOTROS SOMOS ARTISTAS, PERO CADA HOMBRE QUE TRABAJA POR LA AMPLIACION, AUNQUE SEA MENTAL, DE SUS ESPACIOS DE VIDA ES UN ARTISTA'.  
LO QUE SIGNIFICA QUE DIGAMOS EL TRABAJO EN LA VIDA COMO UNICA FORMA CREATIVA Y QUE DIGAMOS, COMO ARTISTAS. NO A LA FICCION EN LA FICCION.

Certainly, then, CADA's *acciones* demonstrate both radical aesthetic and political innovation as well as the ability to carve out dramatic new spaces for a political aesthetic under dictatorship. However, the biopolitical vision for the nation that *the colectivo* attempts to delineate poses significant problems when contrasted with its explicit claim to an equality both of citizenship and of labours (manual and intellectual). In contrasting 'nosotros' and 'cada hombre', even while attempting to dissolve the division between manual and artistic

labour, between the ‘usted’ with ‘piel morena’ and the ‘nosotros’ of the group’s participants, CADA clearly reinstates it.

The group similarly reinstates a division on racial (and implicitly also, more broadly, social) terms. The function of the artist is here tacitly privileged above the function of the labourer (we are all artists, not labourers, according to the terms of the manifesto), and hence the sensible divisions which the artwork intends to disrupt are, at least in part, reinscribed. Here, the maintenance of the division between the artwork and the work of life or of politics (as evidenced in the continued reliance on the manifesto-text) is mirrored in a continued division between the spheres of intellectual/artistic and manual labours. The aim of CADA’s aesthetic is a reconfiguration of reality, and hence the group envisages the artwork as a political project. However, because the artists of CADA reinforce division rather than beginning their aesthetic productions from a genuine assumption of the equality of spheres (art and politics) or of labours (artistic/intellectual and manual), their art functions to reinforce rather than deconstruct the divisions structuring reality. CADA perpetuates a tradition for valuing artistic and intellectual production above manual labour which had already influenced the perception of the political role of art in twentieth-century Latin America, and which becomes the basis for the cultural studies defence of ‘high’ art perpetuated by Richard and other cultural studies theorists.<sup>22</sup>

### ***Subjectivation and Interpellation***

Where the artists of CADA work within the aesthetic paradigm of the historical avant-garde, then, the democratic effect of their art is limited by the hierarchical divisions it perpetuates. However, this is not the sole way in which politics and aesthetics are related in

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<sup>22</sup> Nelly Richard (2004b) argues that in order for the aesthetic to function counter-hegemonically, it must resist assimilation by power. Art which desires truly to resist assimilation into the libidinal economy of consumer capitalism must remain illegible within the symbolic regime through a certain ‘insubordination of signs’. In order to sustain its inscrutability before power, according to Richard, art should resist the facility of mass culture which may initially appear to be more democratic because of the undoubted greater ease of access, and instead embrace the difficulty of traditionally-conceived ‘high’ art. The complexity of the artwork of the neo-avant-garde is vital in Richard’s understanding since it provokes debate and reflection, which function counter-hegemonically with regard to the passive ‘culture spectacle’ of neoliberal capitalist entertainment and its officially homogenising pluralism. As she writes: ‘cultural democracy will have failed if the policies seeking a more egalitarian redistribution of social consumption are not concerned at the same time with stimulating mechanisms for creative participation in the process of elaborating and defining the socially active registers of art and culture, which comprise the base of symbolic material from which society conceptualizes itself’ (2004b: 93).

CADA's work, and the group's attempt to approach a new and radical democracy through the artwork does not end here. Nelly Richard has already identified an inconsistency between the discourse CADA generates and the work the group produces, arguing that 'while the theoretical program defended a totalization of the social for staging the global transformations embraced by the work's content, the "art-actions" *de-multiplied* that totality when they intervened in its signifying planes in a *segmentary* way' (2004b: 30, emphasis in original). Despite the unity of discourse presented in their manifestos, according to Richard, CADA's work undermined that unity and created a discordancy between these two aspects of the group's work.

On the one hand – and without a doubt, this proved the most overt – the texts made avant-garde utopianism resonate with its foundational and messianic echoes, which projected a future redeemed through the abolition of all divisions; on the other, the works set forth a 'situational and situated art' that multiplied *localized* actions at different *points of intersection* in the socio-institutional plot. (Ibid: 31)

According to Richard's analysis, then, CADA's work was beset by a tension between a globalised vision and the group's localised actions, as well as between a discursively avant-garde messianic utopianism and the site-specific significations generated by each individual work. While I agree with Richard that CADA embodies tensions between a re-inscription of problematic avant-garde aesthetic practices and a more radical political thrust, her focus on the artwork as situated in the local and marginal in fact reinstates a binary vision of politics, in which the centre and the margin are opposed but fail to contaminate one another. In other words, while recognising the contradictions at the heart of CADA's work, Richard's analysis does not point to the ways in which CADA actually moves towards transcending dualisms in the foundation of a new conception of a politics of the aesthetic. Indeed, I contend that CADA in fact worked towards a new conception of the political dually founded in the irreducible presence of the body at the heart of the public sphere, and in the creation of an always-impure space for politics characterised by an emphasis on the democratic nature of the supplement. It is in these two aesthetic effects that I locate a resonance with Rancière's first condition for democracy - the 'specific sphere where the people appear'. Thinking CADA in conjunction with Rancière has a twofold effect. In the first place, it works to flesh out an incipient conception of democracy beyond binarisms that lies at the heart of CADA's aesthetic production. In the second place, it underscores Rancière's own conception of politics and police as mutually contaminating spheres, and allows an expansion of this foundational contamination as an aspect of his own politics of the aesthetic that is frequently

ignored or misunderstood in his work's reception.

Firstly, then, CADA's resignification of subjectivity as founded in corporality does not only offer a counterpoint to the destruction of life carried out under dictatorship, but may also ground a farther-reaching democratisation of the aesthetic. The text of the previously analysed *¡Ay Sudamérica!* hints at this proposition in its call for a new method for asserting subjectivity: life as creation.

AY SUDAMERICA.

ASI CONJUNTAMENTE CONSTRUIMOS EL INICIO DE LA OBRA: UN RECONOCIMIENTO EN NUESTRAS MENTES; BORRANDO LOS OFICIOS: LA VIDA COMO UN ACTO CREATIVO...  
ESE ES EL ARTE/LA OBRA/ESTE ES EL TRABAJO DE ARTE QUE NOS PROPONEMOS.

As part of their project to connect art and life, the artists of CADA propose in this statement that life itself is the creative act *par excellence*, and the ultimate foil to the death drive that animates dictatorship. The artwork represents creation rather than destruction, the erotic rather than the thanatotic,<sup>23</sup> and demands the irreducible presence of a body made whole rather than the occlusion of fragmented bodies from a fragmented public sphere. This view of the body as fount of creation is, I argue, the precursor to CADA's conception of the coming into being of the embodied subject, which is crucial in considering the impact of the group on the way in which the relationship between politics and aesthetics can be thought in the post-dictatorial context. The body is the means, in other words, by which CADA imagines the coming into being of the subject independently of either repressive or ideological state apparatuses.

In his essay 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' (1971), Louis Althusser expands upon Karl Marx's conception of the necessary reproduction of labour power to the continuation of hegemony in order to develop his theory about the way in which the individual is related to the state. In this work, he advances the concept of interpellation, which refers to the ways in which power and ideology are reproduced through the coming into being of the subject. According to Althusser, ideology is 'the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence' (1971: 162). Ideology mediates between power and the individual, obscuring overt repression and incorporating the individual into the system of hegemonic power, thereby ensuring the latter's potential for endless reproduction. Through the process of interpellation, the individual recognises himself as a subject in and

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<sup>23</sup> I use 'erotic' and 'thanatotic' in the Freudian sense. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud contrasts and opposes the 'death drives' to 'Eros' (the life force or will to live). For Freud, Eros is not to be confused with the sex drive, although sex is of course a part of the erotic desire to create and maintain life.

through ideology. Althusser distinguishes between two models of interpellation: the repressive State apparatuses (RSAs)<sup>24</sup> and the ideological State apparatuses (ISAs).<sup>25</sup> The former function, as their name suggests, through repression ‘(including physical repression)’, and the latter through ideology (Ibid: 145). The former function to secure the conditions for the operation of the latter, which can then effectively reproduce State power, but simultaneously obscure the mechanisms by which this occurs (Ibid: 150). Interpellation is also called ‘hailing’ by Althusser, and:

can be imagined along the lines of the most common everyday police (or other) hailing: ‘Hey, you there’ [...]. The hailed individual will turn around. By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a subject. Why? Because he has recognised that the hail was ‘really’ addressed to him. (Ibid: 174)

As this example demonstrates, for Althusser, ideology ‘has a material existence’ because of the way it relates to the body (Ibid: 165). It is not material in the same way as a ‘paving stone or a rifle’ but is *embodied* in practice (Ibid: 166). Althusser gives the additional example of religious belief, which provides the illusion of a free choice, but which is nevertheless cemented through a series of embodied practices,<sup>26</sup> ‘which are those of the ideological apparatus on which “depend” the ideas which [the subject] has in all consciousness freely chosen’ (Ibid: 168). It is precisely this materiality that ensures the success of the ideological State apparatuses in their interpellation of the individual into subjectivity and therefore into power.

The problem with this argument concerning interpellation is that it removes the agency of the subject in the process of coming into being, or subjectivation, as per the Rancièrian terminology. Rancière, in redressing this evacuation of agency from his former master’s account of ideology, re-writes Althusser’s notion of ideological interpellation by power in asserting a distinction between politics and police. According to Rancière, writing in the ‘Ten Theses on Politics’ (2001), politics and the police are fundamentally antithetical: ‘Politics is specifically opposed to the police. The police is a “partition of the sensible” whose principle is the absence of a void and of a supplement’ (2001: 8). Rancière questions the narrative that historically divides nations into disciplinary societies or post-disciplinary societies (functioning primarily through repressive or ideological State apparatuses respectively): according to his theory, all power (police) is concerned with the control of the sensible. In the

<sup>24</sup> These include Government, the Army, the Police, the Courts, and the Prisons.

<sup>25</sup> These include religion, schools, the family, the trade unions, the media, and culture.

<sup>26</sup> The subject ‘goes to Church to attend Mass, kneels, prays, confesses, does penance’ and so on (1971: 168).



*Ten Theses*, Rancière writes that ‘The police is not a social function but a symbolic constitution of the social. The essence of the police is neither repression nor even control over the living. Its essence is a certain manner of partitioning the sensible’ (Ibid). The police partition of the sensible refers to the way in which (invisible) divisions are created between those with a part and the *sans-part*. The *sans-part* are kept in their place, excluded from the very workings of the political, by being rendered invisible and inaudible. In other words – and in contention of Althusser’s conception of the individual attaining subjectivity through ideological interpellation by power – Rancière argues that the function of the police is precisely to *deny* the appearance of the subject:

Let us begin from an empirical given: police intervention in public spaces does not consist primarily in the interpellation of demonstrators, but in the breaking up of demonstrations. The police is not that law interpellating individuals (as in Althusser’s ‘Hey, you there!’) unless one confuses it with religious subjectification. It is, first of all, a reminder of the obviousness of what there is, or rather, of what there isn’t: ‘Move along! There is nothing to see here!’ The police says that there is nothing to see on a road, that there is nothing to do but move along. It asserts that the space of circulating is nothing other than the space of circulation. Politics, in contrast, consists in transforming this space of ‘moving-along’ into a space for the appearance of a subject: i.e., the people, the workers, the citizens: It consists in refiguring the space, of what there is to do there, what is to be seen or named therein. (Ibid: 9)

The police order maintains its reality through counting and arranging bodies into their appropriate places and roles. It is dependent upon making these positions seem natural through the exclusion of the supplemental subject (the *sans-part*). Politics, which can disrupt the naturalising police order, is the dissensual re-counting of parts that enforces a broadening of the partition of the sensible: ‘Dissensus is not the confrontation between interests or opinions. It is the manifestation of a distance of the sensible from itself. Politics makes visible that which had no reason to be seen, it lodges one world into another’ (Ibid: 10). As part of this dissensual relationship with the police partition of the sensible, politics is the moment when those who have no part in the police order assert their own part. Rancière calls this moment of assertion ‘political subjectivation’. In what remains of this chapter, I argue that this Rancièrian concept of the contestatory dissensual activity of subjectivation which is the basis for a genuine occurrence of politics (rather than Althusser’s concept of the coming-into-being of the subject through its interpellation into ideology) offers us a way to think CADA’s contribution to the debate about the relationship between politics and aesthetics beyond the avant-garde paradigm.

### *Beyond Biopolitical Control*

In a collection of essays entitled *Emergencias*, Diamela Eltit underscores the link between the military dictatorship and the way in which she and other artists of the *Colectivo* – and of the *avanzada* more generally – represented the body, politics, and power. She argues that the *golpe de estado* in Chile functioned primarily through its attack on otherness and difference, and took aim at the body as a primary focus for political discipline: ‘El cuerpo, como foco político, se convirtió en un trágico territorio modélico de disciplinamiento. Modelo que se hizo primordial a través de la tortura, el crimen y la desaparición’ (2000: 18). The body politic in post-coup Chile, Eltit continues, was fragmented in numerous ways. In the first place, the military radically emptied the city of the bodies of any citizen who did not appear to uphold the norms of the militarized, regimented body politic: ‘Cualquier cuerpo que no correspondiera al cuerpo militar podía ser asesinado porque el tránsito por la ciudad ya estaba prohibido, la ciudad perdía así su carácter público para convertirse en un campo minado’ (Ibid: 20-21). Collective spaces were instantaneously erased from the city-scape, and bodies were divided between the legal and the illegal; those permitted to circulate in public and those confined to the private; bodies in safety and bodies in danger. In this way, a form of ‘counting’ took place, that was designed to maintain the hierarchical order of power. Rather than constituting an inclusive sphere for the expression of the profound heterogeneity of community, the city became instead a space of death and violence. Simultaneously, bodies considered illegal were made invisible:

los prisioneros políticos no eran reconocidos en forma oficial ni pública, y, por lo tanto, virtualmente perdían existencia legal pues los lugares de detención eran clandestinos. Esta forma de inexistencia Kafkiana, en la cual se suspendían reclusos en espacios indeterminados, formaba parte de un escenario cruel, levantado para profundizar el miedo, para acercar la nada a la muerte. (Ibid: 68)

Torture meanwhile functioned through the revelation of the total reliance of the self on its own corporality, and the simultaneous ‘shattering of language’ according to the terminology of Elaine Scarry (1985: 5). And it was made clear to the citizens of Chile that the continuation of their corporeal existence was dependent upon the will of the state. The government exercised a power over life (a biopolitics) that was, while discursively presented as a drive to heal and make whole the social body, in reality founded in a thanatotic drive to destroy, to make invisible, and to divide.

In contention with this destructive shift in the public sphere and in the realm of the

corporeal, CADA's work turned the body into a locus for reintroducing assertions of subjectivity and difference. What we see in the group's work is, I argue, an attempt to create a new erotic bios (as distinct to the thanatotic drive of the dictatorship), as the necessary precursor to the emergence of the democratic subject. In the context of the destruction of the military regime, the irreducible presence of the reconstructed body at the centre of the public sphere represents the claim of the *sans-part* to subjectivity and therefore to politics. As such, the desire to patch up the disintegrated body, and make it whole again, which I identified earlier in *Para no morir de hambre*, represents both a commitment to highlighting the fragmentation of the social body post-coup, and also posits the artwork as a particular political solution. In their own description of the first part of this *acción* (the handing out of the milk), the artists of CADA write that it is intended to represent 'Cada organismo humano negado al consumo diario de proteínas como cuerpo de encarnación de una obra de arte: el arte es la vida corregida'. The implication here is clearly that the artwork can function not only to compensate for, but also to alter and improve, a defective reality. In the case of this initial *acción*, this is achieved (at least temporarily) through the literal consumption of the artwork by the people. The same descriptive accompaniment to the handing out of the milk describes: 'Vasos de leche consumidos como obras de arte en la vida; dormitando en las ciudades – aldeas que habitamos, como una última página de lectura: niños – famélicos – botados – sobre – el – polvo – de – las – calles'. The artists envisioned the artwork as literally being embodied in the person of the spectator or recipient, pointing to a new form of touching or contact through the artwork. The aesthetic insistence upon the body of the starving child is foregrounded here in the use of hyphenated caesuras, which painfully slow the pace of reading. The child lying in the dust is made unambiguously present, and the reader/spectator is forced to recognise his corporeal reality. Yet the artwork's effect extends beyond revelation or denunciation in its refusal to allow the pressing need of the child's hunger to go unaddressed.

The response of the artists is not only to call for a political solution, but to themselves offer the first step in that solution, in the offering of the artwork for literal consumption. CADA's *acciones* are a response to a broader political environment whereby the body is first violently fragmented, and then obscured from the public sphere. And their reaction here is to foreground a new possibility for a body that is not only made whole but that is linked to other bodies through their shared consumption. Rather than being told to 'move along' – that activity central to the policing of the dominant aesthetic distribution – the bodies that comprise Chilean society are being given the opportunity to take the centre stage, and in their

newfound relationality of touch and contact through the drinking of the milk, are envisaged as coming into a new biologically shared subjectivity. Because the artists of CADA originate this subjectivity in the body, it evades the police count that aims to exclude the *sans-part*. The extension of this right to a part – to participate – not only to those who are counted, but to anyone at all, is therefore asserted in this emphasis on the biological or corporeal. And specifically, the emphasis on bodies re-made, or newly whole, enables CADA to consider the way in which subjects come into being in the public sphere. In other words, what CADA uniquely contributes to the debate about aesthetics and politics in the context of the neo-avant-garde is a focus on subjectivity as corporeal connection between subjects.

Another example of this celebratory conception of life as presence, touching, and contact rather than as absence and separation is found in the poem ‘Viuda’, part of CADA’s final *acción* carried out in 1985. By then, only Eltit and Rosenfeld remained in the group: Castillo had moved to Europe, and both Balcells and Zurita had withdrawn their participation. However, the *acción* was the subject of additional collaborations, with the artists working alongside Gonzalo Muñoz, Paz Errázuriz, and *La Agrupación de Mujeres por la Vida*. The artwork consisted of a photograph of a woman in mourning published in the magazines *Hoy*, *Apsi*, and *Cauce*, and the newspapers *La Época*, and *Fortín Mapocho*. The photograph was starkly titled ‘Viuda’, and was accompanied by the following text:

Traemos entonces a comparecer una cara  
anónima, cuya fuerza de identidad es ser  
portadora del drama de seguir habitando  
un territorio donde sus rostros más  
queridos han cesado

Mirar su gesto extremo y popular.  
Prestar atención a su viudez y sobrevivencia.  
Entender a un pueblo.

As with most of CADA’s work, this *acción* implies a critique both of the dictatorial regime and of the denunciatory aesthetic of the Left. Instead of calling attention to the violence of the regime by publishing a picture of a *desaparecido*, CADA cites death and violence through the representation of a life left behind and torn apart. As Neustadt describes, an aesthetic focusing on the visibilisation of the *desaparecidos* was of limited political efficacy since ‘la estrategia en sí termina reiterando la ausencia, la desaparición del desaparecido’ (2001: 38). CADA’s image of the widow does not obscure the death underlying the image: indeed, one is forced to recognise that one half of a pair is missing. However, the insistence upon the living

demonstrates an additional refusal to allow those who are left behind also to ‘disappear’, whereas, in the case of traditional *desaparecido* images, ‘al enfocar solamente en las huellas de los detenidos-desaparecidos, se inflige una especie de violencia doble encima de los sobrevivientes’ (Ibid: 38).

While the identity of the female protagonist of the poem is founded in loss and lack (she is characterised as a widow, and her ‘fuerza de identidad’ comes from her existence in an environment where ‘sus rostros más queridos han cesado’), her widowhood is significantly juxtaposed by CADA with her ‘sobrevivencia’. Her political subjectivity is thus conceived not merely in the terms imposed upon her (her loss, the disappearance of her loved ones), but also in her own terms (which are embodied in her face). She is given the space here to demonstrate her survival against the odds, and, most importantly, to assert her continued presence. The image of the face of the widow, in her survival, refuses to be obscured from the public sphere, refuses to be told to ‘move along’. This recalls Rancière’s analysis in *The Emancipated Spectator* of the Chilean artist Alfredo Jaar’s installation *The Eyes of Gutete Emerita* which focuses on the Rwandan genocide. The 1996 installation is constructed around a photograph showing the eyes of a Tutsi woman who witnessed the massacre of her husband and sons, along with 400 other Rwandans, at a church in Ntarama. Rancière categorises the image in terms of metonymy: there is a substitution of ‘effect for cause, but also two eyes for a million massacred bodies’ (2009b: 97). Most significantly for Rancière, however, is Jaar’s underscoring of the woman’s subjectivity. In the aesthetic use of the body as the unalterable signifier of personhood, Jaar appeals to subjectivity as a disruptive force. The eyes of the witness embody the democratic miscount that makes the collective consist not only of all counted parts, but of any parts at all:

They are the eyes of someone endowed with the same power as those who view them, but also with the same power that her brothers and sisters have been deprived of by the murderers – that of speaking or remaining silent, of showing one’s feelings or hiding them. The metonymy that puts this woman’s gaze in place of the spectacle of horror thus disrupts the counting of the individual and the multiple. (Ibid: 97-8)

I locate a similar appeal to the individual body performing the miscount of the democratic collective in ‘Viuda’, in which the ‘cara’ and the ‘pueblo’ are implicitly not only related but metonymically stand in as substitutes for one another. The ‘pueblo’ here represents the counting of anyone; in other words, it is the miscount that disrupts the order of the dictatorship because it counts each embodied individual. CADA develops this relationship of the single to the plural in the form as well as the content of this poem. ‘Viuda’ begins with a

first-person plural verb ('Traemos') which later gives way to a more open-ended, but similarly inclusive infinitive ('Mirar [...] Prestar [...] Entender'). The aesthetic choices here represent a significant shift away from the group's earlier conception of the relationship between the individual and the collective. Where elsewhere in CADA's work (especially, as discussed above, in *Ay Sudamérica!*) there remains a division between the artist and the spectator, these open-ended verbs suggest a more equal relationship between the two. The act of regarding the face of the widow pre-empts and precludes any exclusive or hierarchical counting of the parts comprising the public sphere. Rather, it enforces a recognition that the body is the guarantee of subjectivation, which can be claimed by all and any parts within the social whole.

### ***Politics and the Supplement***

I have argued that the body is political for CADA because of the way in which it contaminates the dictatorial order with its irreducible presence. This conception of the body at the heart of democratic politics allows the marginal – the *sans-part* – simultaneously to maintain its marginal (or supplemental) status, and to be wholly present as a dissensual force in the public sphere. The 'pueblo' as body appears as a force of contamination, because of this supplementary status: the outside remains supplementary and as such is able to disrupt the normalising counting that operates to hierarchise and to exclude. Yet it is also present, indeed central, within the public sphere, and its presence allows the public sphere to operate as a space where the political moment can occur.

CADA's commitment to the supplemental (expressed frequently in terms of marginality) can be seen in the group's 1981 *acción*, *El fulgor de la huelga*. This performance comprised a staging of a hunger strike in a small metal factory, where the employees had all recently lost their jobs after the Chilean economic crisis caused the factory to cease production. Finding full accounts of this *acción* is difficult since it has not been the subject of academic or critical discussion. However, a video showing the set-up and some scenes from the performance is available as an archival resource.<sup>27</sup> The video begins with an image of graffiti scrawled on a wall, providing the context for the *acción* in poetic form:

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<sup>27</sup> Available to view at the Hemisphere Institute Digital Video Library (<http://hidvl.nyu.edu/video/003186047.html>).

Desde la marginalidad  
 Proyecto materializar  
 Una realidad que vive  
 Reprimida en mi cabeza

The video recording of this otherwise illegible urban scrawl establishes the foundation for the politics of the supplemental and, by association, the contaminatory which I see as a prominent feature of CADA's later *acciones*. The staging of the hunger strike is not enacted in the name of any explicit political demand. It is rather the contradictory centralisation of marginality. The marginal (or *sans-part*) is the starting point for the utterance of CADA's performance. Yet the group makes no claim for the marginal to be reintegrated into the centre. It remains starkly outside the workings of power, and it is this supplementarity that allows it to retain its disruptive or dissensual force. I locate in this *acción* a way of conceptualising CADA's performative artwork as political in a radical sense through its focus on the supplemental, which occurs here on multiple levels. Firstly, the graffiti represents that which is outside the circuits of legibility and legitimacy within the city. It is a form of writing more usually confined to the unseen or illegible, and its foregrounding here demonstrates a commitment to the centralising of the excluded supplement. The video itself represents a further level of supplementarity. It is both a reiteration of the artistic intervention, and it also stands in for the fleeting *acción*, while at the same time supplementing the original material with a surplus presentation of background or preparatory scenes to the artwork. Finally, the staged strike exemplifies CADA's conception of the supplemental nature of the artwork with regard to life. The *acción* is both an intervention into life in its democratic inclusion of the supplemental subject as a corporeal block to the flows of power and capital, yet the viewer is also reminded of the constructed nature of the scene, and thereby of its simultaneous distinction from the sensible distribution of life. This supplementarity as the foreground of political contamination resonates with Rancière's conception of the relationship between the categories of politics and the police, often misread in critical works dealing with his theory.

Rancière's political theory has been the subject of critique (most notably by Slavoj Žižek) because of its putative political purism. In the afterword to Rancière's *The Politics of Aesthetics* (2008) Žižek identifies a group comprising Rancière, Badiou, Balibar, Laclau, and Mouffe, whom he describes as the 'post-Althusserian partisans of "pure politics"' (2008: 75). A reading of Rancière as subscribing to a vision of political purism, as Samuel Chambers discusses in *The Lessons of Rancière*, is an appealing solution to the often confusingly, or even paradoxically, free-floating nature of Rancière's political theory, and as a result, 'some

of Rancière's best interpreters [...] have followed one of these tempting readings and either taken Rancière's work to support a pure theory of politics or supplemented his account with a third term that would somehow mediate the relation between politics and police' (2013: 40). Such readings certainly iterate a certain purism of the political, but they disregard Rancière's own assertions, both implicit in most of his political writings, and explicit in the 2011 essay entitled 'The Thinking of Dissensus'. In this work, Rancière aims to disentangle the distinction he elaborates between 'politics' and 'police' from an idea that his work seeks to establish 'the purity of politics' (2011: 2). Indeed, as he explicitly states, 'There is no "pure" politics' (Ibid: 3). The political stands in opposition to the police, but it is at the same time irrevocably embedded within that sphere. It is itself supplementary to the police order, and it is also the expression of the supplement (the miscount) that the police order attempts to suppress. Both the police and politics are the stages for a distinct embodiment. The police is 'the configuration of the political community as a collective body with its places and functions allotted according to the competences specific to groups and individuals' (Ibid). Meanwhile, politics is an embodiment founded in the out-of-place, in bodies staking a claim outside or in excess of the distributions of the police. Politics can never be a permanent state, but it is always an expression of impurity or contamination of the police order in which it occurs. As a result, the police order is never undone, although it can be altered by the occurrence of the political moment. As Chambers writes, 'politics as an act of impurity, must always be both tied to and engaged in conflict with the police order. Politics can do nothing else than this: renegotiate and reconfigure the police order' (2013: 65). The police, for Rancière, is an expansive category: as he writes in *Disagreement*, it is employed in a 'broader sense that is also "neutral," nonpejorative' (1999: 29). In other words, policing is the status quo, and it will remain so, but positive shifts in the ordering of the police can be achieved through disruptive moments of democracy that reorder the distribution of bodies, through the claim to a part by the supplementary *sans-part*.

In *Disagreement*, Rancière utilises the example of the strike as an illustration of the way in which politics can operate to negotiate a shift in the distributive order of the police. A strike, for Rancière, along with the practices of government and state, and the oppositional practices of traditionally-conceived political struggle, cannot be assumed to be radically political, in the sense of being inevitably disruptive to the police order. A strike *can* be political, but only when it is concerned uniquely with a reordering of bodies towards a goal of axiomatic equality, which is the only proper object of politics. It is not the scope of the demands of the strike that determine its political nature, but only its disruptive power:



A strike is not political when it calls for reforms rather than a better deal or when it attacks the relationships of authority rather than the inadequacy of wages. It is political when it reconfigures the relationships that determine the workplace in its relations to the community. (1999: 32)

In other words, the political potential of the strike is found in the confrontation between the order of the police and the disorder of politics. The political moment is the one in which the logic of the police is shown to be illogical, because it is founded in inequality – ‘For politics to occur, there must be a meeting point between police logic and egalitarian logic’ (Ibid: 34). This is what is meant by politics occurring as the supplement to the police. It is both directly opposed to the police, and at the same time, must meet the police logic – confrontationally – on the terrain on which the police operates. This quote by Rancière does, however, offer one potential source for the various critiques of his presumed political purism. He may appear here to attempt a normative ‘disciplining’ of the ‘genuinely’ political, such that the strike is political only when it occurs under the ‘correct’ circumstances as he identifies and describes them. The expansion upon the terms of the political in the artwork (to include the erotic body, the sexual encounter, and the relationality of community) which I have discussed here, and go on to discuss in the following two chapters, works to disrupt any nascent purism in this conception of radical politics, and, I argue, remains true to Rancière’s vision of the political as encapsulating dissensus and disorder in a way that a more ‘pure’ theorising cannot achieve.

I see precisely this mixed, supplemental meeting of politics and the police at work in the democratising idiom of *El fulgor*. Here, the staging of the strike is made without any express demands. The artists of CADA are not even really striking; they are merely enacting the hunger strike, and in so doing, they place the body at the centre of the sphere for politics. Not only is it centralised in the artwork, but the body also enacts a political blocking of the flows of capital reproduction. The staged strike interrupts the circulation of objects and capital within the public sphere, through the placing of the body – no longer either commodity or embodiment of alienated capital – as an obstacle to the reproduction of the status quo. The group speak from a position of marginality and repression, but far from symbolically retreating to those positions, they aim to embody them in the public sphere; the artwork is a project of embodiment or materialisation. The five artists of CADA appear in the *acción* lying on the floor under blankets marked with the word CADA. One by one, they rise, sometimes move or walk around, and then leave the scene. In their anonymity and silence,

their bodies substitute not only for the bodies of the workers who lost their jobs at the factory, but also for the bodies of anyone. In other words, the performance embodies the right to a political voice of any and everyone, a claim that is later exploited to its extreme political consequence in CADA's ongoing performance, entitled *No+* (a supplemental 'no' following on from the earlier refusal to eat in *El fulgor*).

When asked by Robert Neustadt in interview, Lotty Rosenfeld, Raúl Zurita, and Diamela Eltit all separately cite *No+* as the most important *acción* undertaken by CADA. It consisted of a collective call to artists in Santiago to cover the city at night-time with the graffitied phrase 'No +'. Subsequently, members of the public began completing the phrase, to read 'No + dictadura', 'No + tortura', 'No + armas', 'No + desaparecidos', 'No + muerte', and so on. In CADA's founding document (the *Fundamentación*), the group states the central role the dissolution of aesthetic and political hierarchies assumes in its work: 'En una sociedad estrictamente verticalizada como la nuestra, la presencia del arte en la vida sólo puede ser el producto de situaciones que rompen con el lugar enclaustrado y la función elitaria asignados por la oficialidad'.<sup>28</sup> I argued earlier in this chapter that this stated aim was not always achieved by CADA, with a sometimes problematic didacticism continuing and even strengthening the division between the artist and the spectator the group claimed to counter. However, in the *No+*, which established the groundwork for genuinely spontaneous participation, CADA offered something new and radically political in its conception of the public sphere as a location for non-hierarchical collective (co-)production. *No +* required (and attained) a genuinely active community participation, a constant supplementation of the art-work by the creative, collective labour that would otherwise be deployed in the reproduction of the social: as Neustadt writes 'Para el grupo CADA, la obra implicaba una acción artística en que desaparecía por completo la autoría' (2001: 37). The *No+ acción* has extended subsequently far beyond the boundaries originally intended by CADA, significantly becoming an instrumental symbol uniting the nation in the massive anti-dictatorial demonstrations of the late 1980s. The symbol received institutional status when it was later used in the campaign for the 'No' vote in the plebiscite of 1988, which was responsible for bringing the dictatorship to a close two years later.

In *No +*, CADA not only eliminates the didactic or pedagogical tone of its earlier *acciones*, which, while ostensibly committed to removing the boundary separating actor from spectator, actually worked to re-inscribe it in a repetition of historical avant-garde practice,

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<sup>28</sup> Cited in Neustadt (2001: 112).

but *the colectivo* also initiates a new means of thinking about the presence of the individual and collective body in the public sphere as the starting place for politics. Specifically, the politics the group envisions in this *acción* is one that would remain open to countersigning and appropriation by otherwise invisible actors. According to Rancière's theory of politics, the political occurs in dissensus from the police order, located in the moment at which each and every anonymous individual claims their right to be seen and heard through their own action, thereby eliminating structuring hierarchies of the social that restrict and emplace. CADA here provides the space precisely for this indiscriminate action of the individual. The *acción* contains no preconceptions about what must complete the 'No + ...' phrase such that there is a genuine opportunity for any and every voice to be heard. It therefore resonates with the Rancièrian political moment, which 'is the employment of the capacity of anyone whatsoever, of the quality of human beings without qualities' (2009b: 49). According to Rancière there is no single route to this moment of emancipatory escape from the police order: 'Everywhere there are starting points, intersections and junctions that enable us to learn something new if we refuse, firstly, radical distance, secondly the distribution of roles, and thirdly the boundaries between territories' (Ibid: 17).

This notion of the intersection resonates with the symbolic significance of the + of CADA's *acción*. The crossing of the vertical and horizontal lines represents both a crossing of hierarchies and divisions, and a moment of contact and intersection between bodies. The spectator is empowered both in his spectatorship and in the claiming of his ability also to act, and the public sphere is reconstructed through the touching of bodies and purposes in a newfound subjectivity founded in collectivity. These crossings of bodies, subjects, and signs work to 'cancel' the authority of the military logic that underscores both dictatorship *and* the historical avant-garde. Furthermore, the cross of the *No+* operates as a resignification of the Christian symbolism of the cross – invoked by Saint-Simon in his reference to the 'priesthood' that would guide the masses, *and* by the Catholicism employed by the military dictatorship as a partial justification for their erasure of political opposition. In both cases (the re-signification of the military logic and of Christian symbolism) CADA takes aim both at the dictatorship and at the historical avant-garde, establishing instead a series of counter-signs and social crossings that reconfigure the conception of the public sphere as a space for politics, rather than as the vehicle for a series of (religious or aesthetic) transcendent hierarchies.

### *Thinking Politics and Aesthetics After CADA*

For CADA, the aesthetic moment of *No* + became the literal political moment, since the artwork was the basis for the slogan that helped to win the plebiscite that finally overturned the Pinochet government. The group's artistic interventions therefore provide a crucial starting point in any thinking about the relationship between politics and aesthetics in the context of Chile (and, more generally, the Southern Cone). I argued in this initial chapter that CADA, in spite of its explicit commitment to equality, often failed to produce this effect through its aesthetic production because of the re-inscription of certain avant-garde paradigms for thinking the relationship between aesthetics and politics in its work. However, the aesthetic innovations of the group open up vast areas for the political artwork to explore, and point the way for a new thinking about aesthetics and politics that moves beyond the avant-garde paradigm. In the first place, CADA provokes serious consideration into means of standing outside the institution in a postmodern neoliberal context. While I suggest that the group does not wholly succeed in severing the link between the artwork and its institutional framing devices, its strongly anti-institutional stance is echoed in the queer literature I go on to discuss in the following chapter of this thesis. Secondly, CADA's innovative use of the body and of notions of fragmentation and wholeness signal a desire to think democracy that is both founded in and able to move beyond past trauma. This is the principal strand for investigation in the subsequent chapter focusing on CADA artist Raúl Zurita and fellow poet Juan Gelman. In both the chapters that follow, the aesthetic centralising of the body and of the disordering supplement are a vital point of consideration in a delineation of the development of the politics of the aesthetic in post-dictatorship cultural production.

## **II.**

### **Displacing Identities:**

#### **Nomadic Desires of the *ciudad-ano***

*There is democracy if there are specific political performers who are neither agents of the state apparatus nor parts of society, if there are groups that displace identities as far as parts of the state or of society go.*

Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement*

### ***Introduction: A Queer Art?***

In the previous chapter I explored the possibility for the imagining of a public sphere where politics could occur, predicated upon a claim by marginal subjects to a part in the distribution of the sensible. In the case of CADA, this claim was founded in the irreducible presence of the body, and, significantly, in its erotic life-affirming drives. In the chapter that follows, I delve further into the political consequences of an aesthetic centralisation of the body, and specifically of sexuality and the erotic, in an examination of works by Pedro Lemebel and Néstor Perlongher. The comparison of texts by Lemebel and Perlongher serves a twofold purpose in this chapter. In the first place, the contrasting of the significance identity (or rather disidentity)<sup>29</sup> assumes for these two authors, read in conjunction with the Rancièrian mistrust of any classificatory impulse, gestures towards a possibility that ‘queer’ writing might be envisaged as making a political claim beyond preoccupations with any residual identitarianism implicit in a privileged focus on the sexual. At the same time, the texts under study here point to a conception of ‘queer’ beyond the academy, since both writers situate their texts in the urban reality of the *calle*. And in the second place, while this chapter still operates broadly within a Rancièrian theoretical framework, the queer focus of the texts allows a movement towards an expansion of the category of the ‘partition of the sensible’, largely reserved by Rancière for the political and the aesthetic, to include also the sexual. In so doing, it productively complicates these former categories in a rejection of theoretical purism, which, as I argued previously, itself approximates the Rancièrian theoretical position of supplementarity, contamination, and a limitless queering of boundaries.

The first section of this chapter examines both the resonances with queer theory in the work of Lemebel and Perlongher, as well as the points of conflict arising from a juxtaposition of theory and artistic reality. There is a clear drive to a broad queering of categories at work

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<sup>29</sup> I use this term throughout the chapter to refer to the phenomenon I identify in the work of both Lemebel and Perlongher whereby not only the boundaries of normative identificatory processes are disrupted and queered, but also the borders of individuality or selfhood are surrendered in favour of the expression of a politicised relationality with otherness.

in both writers' texts, yet while this is related to the queer politics theorised by the Anglo-American academy, it remains distinct from any articulation of a single theoretical perspective. In particular, I argue that to attempt to fit these writers to any theoretical paradigm would be to ignore the radical emphasis on an endless disidentificatory drive which is central to their work. With regards to this simultaneous approximation to and alienation from queer theoretical perspectives, it is also important to highlight that in spite of the engagement with gender, sexuality, and (anti)normativity in the work of both authors, neither explicitly uses the term 'queer' to describe their work, and therefore I apply the term advisedly in the chapter that follows. Following Brad Epps (2008), it should be emphasised that the translation of the term 'queer' into a non-Anglophone environment is itself problematic owing to the contextual specificities of its use. Epps relates both the re-appropriation of the original word from insult to focal point of pride, and the multiple environments to which the word is able to belong in the English-language context:

En un contexto angloparlante, la fuerza histórico-discursiva de 'queer', precaria y polivalente como insulto y valor, implica tanto la calle como el aula, tanto la esfera privada del hogar como la esfera pública de la polis, tanto las 'alturas' de la reflexión filosófica como los 'bajos fondos' de la violencia física. (2008: 899)

In considering the ways in which an examination of Perlongher and Lemebel's writing functions to interrogate some of the founding assumptions of queer theory, the linguistic, geographical, and cultural specificity of the term as described by Epps is clearly important. However, as will be shown below, the works of both Perlongher and Lemebel do in fact function according to many of the paradigms of queer theory, and signify heterogeneously, across the public-private, and academic-popular divide signalled by Epps as being key to the queer model for politics. Furthermore, in both cases, the texts examined here demonstrate the (typically queer) refusal of fixed categories of identity, the focus on desire (without a fixed object-choice) as a political force, and a reflection upon the ambiguous and contradictory affective result of a sexual choice that enacts a consistently dissensual relationship with normativity.

Néstor Perlongher (1942-1992) was an Argentine poet, writer of short stories, and anthropologist. His work is broad-spanning both in terms of its formal or generic belonging and in terms of its subject matter. While he is well known as a poet in Argentina, he spent a considerable part of his later life in exile in Brazil, where he completed a master's thesis in anthropology. Entitled *O negócio do michê: prostituição viril em São Paulo* (1987), this work

constituted a major study of a then largely ignored subject area. His output furthermore comprises a large body of essays, a small collection of short stories, and an extensive poetic oeuvre. Perlongher named his own poetic and prosaic style *neobarroso*. This term draws on the concept of the *neobarroco*, which is itself a kind of kitsch re-writing of baroque literary techniques.<sup>30</sup> Perlongher differentiates between the ‘neobarroco’ and its particular manifestation in the Argentine context. There, he argues, ‘la poética neobarroca enfrenta una tradición literaria hostil, anclada en la pretensión de un realismo de profundidad que suele acabar chapoteando en las aguas lodosas del río’ (1997a: 101). This study focuses primarily on Perlongher’s poetic production, however, his non-fictional writings are also of relevance to the queered relationality I locate as central to his work, and therefore they feature alongside the poetic works under discussion in this chapter. While Perlongher’s literary output largely precedes the global rise of the embracing of a queer (dis)identification as a global discourse of radical politics (embodied in such international movements as the ACT UP coalition, and Queer Nation), as well as the increasing academic debate surrounding queer theory, his work anticipates many of the concerns of both the queer activist movements and of the academic discourse reflecting on them. While the author himself was openly gay, championed gay rights organisations in Argentina in the 1960s and 70s, and wrote about gay themes in much of his work, in Perlongher’s earlier, most highly sexualised work, he generally categorised the political implications of sexuality in terms of desire rather than any narrowly defined homosexual identity politics. Indeed, throughout his work, Perlongher questions not only fixed notions of sexuality, but also of subjectivity, writing of ‘being’ as a process of Deleuzian ‘becoming’: ‘Ser es devenir: devenir negro, devenir mujer, devenir loca, devenir niño’ (1997: 21).

Lemebel was born Pedro Mardones Lemebel in 1955 in Santiago, Chile. From a background of poverty, he made his first steps into the world of letters in the 1980s through a series of workshops led by the feminist writer Pía Barros. Mardones Lemebel won a prize for the short story ‘Porque el tiempo está cerca’ in the *Caja de Compensación Javiera Carrera* competition in 1982, and an anthology of his stories, *Los incontables* was published in 1986. The author then jettisoned the patronymic Mardones, later asserting in interview ‘El Lemebel es un gesto de alianza con lo femenino, inscribir un apellido materno, reconocer a mi madre huacha desde la ilegalidad homosexual y travesti’ (Blanco and Gelpí, 1997: 93-94). There is

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<sup>30</sup> Other writers belonging to the small canon of the ‘neobarroso’ include Osvaldo Lamborghini (Argentina) and Reinaldo Arenas (Cuba). As Ben Bollig notes, Perlongher was central to the anthologising of literary works by these and other authors, and as such, to the solidification of the movement (2008: 7).



already, then, a clear suggestion of the way in which the author uses gendered identity for political dissensus, to question the boundaries of inclusion within society, and to move towards an alternative form of community characterised by an identification with the otherness that is in-between, with the part which has no part. Lemebel seeks out those who cannot be sensibly perceived, and uses his art as a point of identification with those who are not counted within the ‘proper’ order of roles and parts. During dictatorship, Lemebel engaged with this impossible identification with otherness through performance: in 1987, together with artist Francisco Casas, he formed the art collective *Las Yeguas del Apocalipsis*, a performance group operating through an aesthetically envisioned activism. The *yeguas* (mares) used their own bodies as integral components of their art, an aesthetic choice designed to call attention both to the physical devastation experienced by the homosexual population as a result of the initial dramatic spread of AIDS, and to the violence enacted on the Chilean population by the military government, along with the regime’s simultaneous invisibilising of this violence and ‘disappearance’ of bodies. Writing some fifteen years later, Lemebel describes his own ‘queer’ aesthetics:

Vadeando los géneros binarios, escurriéndose de la postal sepia de la familia y sobre todo escamoteando la vigilancia del discurso; más bien aprovechando sus intervalos y silencios; entremedio y a medias, reciclando una oralidad del detritus como alquimia excretora que demarca en el goce esfinteral su crónica rosa. (2000: 124)

Thematically, this short text raises many of the concerns which characterise Lemebel’s oeuvre. In the first place, the text evidences a clear desire to escape reductionist divisions of gender and genre, the hegemony of heteronormative institutions (in particular the family),<sup>31</sup> and the discourses of power. Lemebel instead proposes that marginality and difference might offer sites of strategic resistance, as well as exploring the political potential of aesthetic categories of excess and waste, corporality and scatology, and pleasure and desire. The writer’s aesthetic choices here also provide the reader with a great deal of information about the textual manifestation of his political commitments. The use of the continuous present

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<sup>31</sup> The family has, of course, long been placed under scrutiny by progressive politics, at least since the appearance of Friedrich Engel’s treatise entitled *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884). In this text, Engels argues – building on Marx’s own unfinished manuscript – that the earliest models of domesticity were matrilineal. This enabled a primitive form of communism, whereby solidarity and commonality were valued highly. With the rise of a farming economy, and the increased value afforded to material goods, a shift towards a patrilineal domestic economy occurred. As such, the rise of the modern, monogamous, heterosexual family is closely associated with a social and political reality founded in the preservation of property. Still today, in the light of contemporary legislation for marriage equality, the family remains an object of suspicion as alternative models of queered kinship are undermined by the coterminous implicit appeal to traditional, conservative family values.

suggests the privileging of a fluid becoming rather than a static being. The mobile and evasive verbs point to a desire to avoid the static or monumental discourse of ideology. The linguistic complexity suggests a reclaiming and rewriting of a 'high' art that resists the facile reductionism of popular texts in thrall to the market. And finally, the foregrounding of sensuality and the erotic implies an attempt to define a new textual libidinal economy which functions outside the utilitarian transactions of capitalist exchange.

It is clear even from these brief introductions to the authors that both approach what might be termed a queer aesthetic drive in their work, albeit expressed in contrasting ways (which will be explored in full below). However, as I suggested above, I also locate in their work a questioning of any form of identification such that even queer theory appears inadequate as a framework for a reading of their aesthetic. According to David Halperin, writing in *Saint Foucault*:

Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without an essence. 'Queer' then, demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative. (1995: 62)

This definition, according to my reading, has two significant problems when confronted with the works of Lemebel and Perlongher. In the first place, it markedly omits to mention the sexual, the corporeal, or the field of desire as points of dissensus, whereas for both authors, these areas remain key in their queering of the political sphere. In the second place, it ignores the threat of normalisation implicit in the positionality which Halperin locates at the heart of queer. The aggressive assumption of *non-identity* in contradiction to identity, runs the risk of itself being reified into a new kind of identity. And the artworks under study in this chapter themselves resist this identificatory reification in the expression of a messy, contaminatory reality that refuses any theoretical appropriation. In this movement towards total *disidentification*, I locate a resonance with Rancièrian subjectivation, which other critics have aligned with queer theory.<sup>32</sup> Samuel Chambers and Michael O'Rourke (the editors of the edition of *Borderlands* that deals with this alignment) state their belief that a Rancièrian focus might serve to rescue queer theory from the mainstream which continually attempts to co-opt it, and from the nominal confusion with 'gay and lesbian studies'. This latter reduces queer politics to 'a set of strategic moves within the terms and framework of liberal-

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<sup>32</sup> Notably Samuel A. Chambers in *The Lessons of Rancière* (2013), and the contributors to Vol. 8 of the *Borderlands* online journal, which is dedicated to the juxtaposition of Rancière's politics and queer theory.

democratic social orders', whereas Rancière's endless resistance to the proper, and to the hierarchical distribution of roles and parts, when applied to the specific issues related to queer theory, might help it to recover and maintain its defiant, deviant, and dissensual focus, which is precisely where its political potential lies (Chambers & O'Rourke, 2009: 4).

In recognising this shift away from even the residual theoretical purism that resides in the academic theorising of the queer, I draw on Oliver Davis' elaboration of Rancièrian queer theory, which Davis characterises as a radically egalitarian praxis. In his 2009 article entitled 'Rancière and Queer Theory', he argues, indeed, that it is in Rancière's formalist account of subjectivation that the basis for the affinity between his political theory and queer theory is to be found, in addition to 'his account of the radical contingency of existing political structures' which 'necessarily includes the array of practices, structures and modes of kinship known to queer theory as "heteronormativity"' (2009: 2). However, Davis acknowledges an inevitable degree of 'natural irritation' arising from this encounter, not least because of Rancière's explicit critique of queer theory (particularly the latter's reliance on Foucault) in the essay 'The Difficult Legacy of Michel Foucault', published in *Chronicles of Consensual Times* (2010). Most pertinent to this discussion, however, is Davis' assertion that any Rancièrian queer theory must be consistent in its radical egalitarianism. It must 'remain true to the resistance his work embodies to the political self-legitimation of knowledge-based elites, to his democratic and egalitarian questioning of authority rooted in technocratic claims to specialist "expertise"' (Ibid: 10). This follows from Rancière's model of egalitarian kinship proposed in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, as well as from his methodological approach to constructing history from the voices of individual subjects in *The Nights of Labour*.

A Rancièrian queer theory, then, would seek to reject top-down theorisation in favour of an attention to the voices of queer subjects, and their 'complex self-understanding' (Ibid). If we consider this Rancièrian praxis as a supplement to the existing political paradigm of queer theory, it provides a base from which to consider the ways in which a type of queer aesthetic can emerge outside the Anglo-American academy. An examination of the queer relationalities at play in the work of both Lemebel and Perlongher can offer an insight into an egalitarian project proposed by the two authors which, I argue, escapes the sometimes programmatic nature of a strict adherence to left-queer politics. As I discuss in the main body of this chapter, both Perlongher and Lemebel introduce the identification with queered subjectivities as a privileged position to contest consensus, and to re-distribute the sensible such that it is based on the axiomatic assertion of the equality of corporeal beings. Both authors also engage with figures of gendered and sexual division and in so doing, enact a

fiercely disidentitarian drive in their aesthetic. In these tendencies in their work, there are useful parallels to be drawn with Rancière's theory of subjectivation, and through this, with the more radically democratic elements of queer theory.

However, this encounter also makes clear the distance between the theoretical expression and the uncontrolled, contaminatory artwork. Both Perlongher's insistence upon a materiality that cannot be recuperated by the other side of the Cartesian dichotomy, and Lemebel's rejection of the fetishised spectacle of sex under neoliberalism in favour of a similarly messy corporality, point to a problem with this proposed encounter between artwork and a theory of subjectivation, which is namely the lack of engagement with the corporeal in Rancière's conception of the redistribution of the sensible. In a recent interview published in the French magazine *Les Inrockuptibles*, commenting on the then-forthcoming edition of *Borderlands*, Rancière simultaneously conceded the link between his work and queer theory, while also distancing his politics from the latter, precisely because of its sexual nature. Sex, he suggested somewhat bluntly, was not a primary factor in his consideration of the political redistribution of the sensible.<sup>33</sup> The editors of *Borderlands* emulate Rancière in (at least temporarily) moving away from the radical potential for dissensus found in queer modalities of the corporeal and sexual, stating that: 'the radical potential in such an encounter lies precisely in working through the non-sexual aspects of queer thinking' (2009: 3). However, I contend that it is more productive to examine this unease with the acknowledgement of the sexual as a central point in the aesthetic redistribution of the sensible. In rejecting the sexual as a modality of the sensible which could thus be appropriated for a political intervention into the police order, Rancière himself reinforces – indeed may even 'police' – a certain normative division of roles and parts, such that the aesthetic is available as a category for sensible redistribution, but the sexual is not. The sexualised body is thus excluded from the visible, the audible, and the sayable, and a hierarchy is established between various forms of sensible expression: art is visible, the sexual body is not. So while Rancière does explicitly link bodily practices with the distribution of the sensible (especially, for example, in the *Nights of Labour* as discussed above, in which it is the bodily positioning of the workers that

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<sup>33</sup> Rancière's comments in interview are recorded in the *Borderlands* article: 'Je ne connais pas très bien la littérature queer, mais je pense qu'elle n'est pas sans lien avec ce que j'essaie de faire, même si je ne me suis pas occupé de la question de la construction sexuelle, qui est au cœur de la question queer. Une revue veut confronter la théorie queer avec mes écrits. Le programme est de mettre plus de Rancière dans la pensée queer et plus de queer dans la pensée de Rancière {rires}'. In response to the question as to whether this interests him he replies, laughing again: 'Oui. Mais le courant queer peut devenir aussi une forme d'identification. En cela, le dialogue peut être intéressant. Donc, voilà, j'attends d'être queerisé' (cited in Chambers and O'Rourke, 2009: 13, my emphasis).

is designed to maintain the distribution of parts according to the hierarchy of proper roles), his conception of aesthetic dissensus can only be strengthened through a consideration of the sexual as one more modality of the aesthetic (the sensible).

While Rancière has dramatically rethought aesthetics as a modality of the political, his work has not thus far included the sexual as a modality of the aesthetic. This is in contrast to Leo Bersani, for whom, explicitly, the ‘aesthetic is not confined to works of art: sex can also be one of the modalities of the aesthetic’ (2010: 70). In the collection of essays entitled *Is the Rectum a Grave*, Bersani attempts both to envision the sexual as aesthetic, and to expand upon psychoanalytic thinking of the sexual such that the perception of sex as self-shattering – an extension of the death drive – as theorised by Freud, Lacan, and Jean Laplanche, actually becomes the expression of a certain expansiveness towards the other. The second part of this chapter, therefore, focuses not only on the *corporeal* which, as I have already argued, assumes a unique position in a consideration of the political aesthetic, but also explicitly on the aesthetic expression of the *sexual* and its political consequences in Perlongher and Lemebel’s works.

### ***The Desiring Subject: Identity and Disidentification***

Both Lemebel and Perlongher link dissensual gendered and sexual (dis)identity to an in-between subject-position that aligns with the feminine. Specifically, the authors work to centralise the figures of the *travesti*, *marica*, or *loca* – the effeminate, often transvestite, homosexual. In both cases, the *loca/travesti* acts as a subject-position who challenges not only normative gendered identity but also the strictures of class, and, particularly in the case of Lemebel, the cultural imperialism dominating global identity politics.

Lemebel’s famous poetic ‘Manifiesto (Hablo por mi diferencia)’, published in the collection *Loco afán* (1996), encapsulates the simultaneous desire of the author to assume a strategic identification with a position of homosexual marginality in order to subvert political and social consensus, while at the same time working to avoid the limitations that such an identificatory strategy might imply – most notably the danger of re-reification within a binary matrix for gendered identification. As a note in *Loco afán* states, Lemebel originally performed this text as a poetic intervention ‘en un acto político de la izquierda’ in 1986, and the poem therefore assumes a more clearly explicatory tone than is found elsewhere in Lemebel’s writing. Indeed, and in contrast to the often elaborate maskings and disguises

performed by Lemebel's *locas*, the poem begins with a stated opposition to the occlusion of identity:

No soy un marica disfrazado de poeta  
 No necesito disfraz  
 Aquí está mi cara  
 Hablo por mi diferencia  
 Defiendo lo que soy  
 Y no soy tan raro. (1996: 79)

In these first lines of the poem, Lemebel moves from a negative ('no soy ...') to a positive self-definition made explicit in the active verbs at the beginning of each of the final lines ('Hablo', 'Defiendo'). Notably, he also references an identity that transcends the performative, rejecting both the costume and the mask, and attempting to reveal the real face beneath. That positive self-identification is founded in a strategic assumption of a position of difference linked later in the poem to sexuality. Sexual difference speaks to the political in three ways in the work of Lemebel. In the first place, marginalised sexuality operates as a position from which to challenge the political limitations of post-dictatorship Chile. As I discussed in the introduction to this work, Lemebel is vocal in his assertion of the marked continuities between the Chilean dictatorship and the democracy that follows, and in this poem describes his distrust of 'esta cueca democrática', a democracy in appearance only. Secondly, the direct association with homosexuality represents Lemebel's explicit discontent with leftist political positions that, at least in the Latin American context, function to exclude non-normative sexual behaviour (he references in this poem 'el marxismo que me rechazó tantas veces'). Significantly, Lemebel challenges the orthodox Marxist position that emphasises class as the basis for a politicised identity:

Pero no me hable del proletariado  
 Porque ser pobre y maricón es peor  
 Hay que ser ácido para soportarlo. (Ibid)

So while Lemebel stands in strident opposition to the forces of globalised capitalism, his politics remains outside traditional class groupings and, I argue, a particular kind of (feminised) gay identification takes priority over a class-based identification, primarily because the latter is usually the basis for orthodox Marxism. Here, Lemebel does not reject socioeconomics as a basis for identification, but *does* reject the appeal to conventional Marxist terminology ('el proletariado'), preferring instead the more generic 'pobre'. This

subtle terminological shift intersects partially with Rancière's reclamation of the 'people' as subjects of dissensus (the *sans-part*), although remains distinct from the use of the people qua 'pueblo' by populist politics. For Lemebel the dissensual subject makes a claim to a 'part' to use the Rancièrian terminology, through a combination of both gendered and socioeconomic identification. And finally, Lemebel's emphasis on *loca* culture within gay culture more generally works to challenge the hegemony of the US-imported model of homosexuality with its normalising insistence on the masculinity of the gay male. His texts therefore approach the question of sexual difference from a notably post-colonial position, pointing to the disappearance of sexual diversity as a symptom of global cultural and economic homogeneity and hegemony.

Lemebel considers queer sexualities to be particularly politically effective because of their ability to 'contaminate' the purity of the idealised vision of national identification. It is important to emphasise the author's ongoing critique of the way in which certain homosexual or queer identities are permitted to circulate freely in the context of hegemonic globalised capital to the exclusion of others. As a result, he resists a straightforward association of radical politics with queer identity. However, in this poem, Lemebel suggests that an identification with a subversive sexuality can serve to undermine or even block hierarchical divisions of reality:

¿El futuro será en blanco y negro?  
 ¿El tiempo en noche y día laboral  
 sin ambigüedades?  
 ¿No habrá un maricón en alguna esquina  
 desequilibrando el futuro de su hombre nuevo?  
 ¿Van a dejarnos bordar de pájaros  
 las banderas de la patria libre? (1996: 81)

The *loca* assumes for Lemebel a particular out-of-place role that enacts an endlessly dissensual relationship with any classificatory drive, and as such, defies the queer identification that the author elsewhere appeals to, in what proves to be his most productive paradox. The divisions of black and white, nights (of leisure) and days (of work), are disturbed by ambiguities, unbalanced by the disruptive figure on the street corner. The corner itself, here and in the collection *La esquina es mi corazón*, encompasses multiple significations. For Lemebel it represents a privileged site of intersections, and also embodies his broader rejection of fixity or stasis. Lemebel's texts work to undermine the hierarchical and permanent structure of the home and the family, instead privileging the fluid and ever-

changing urban peregrinations of his characters. Yet the corner populated by the ‘maricón’ here also represents the politicised intersection with and interruption of the flows of global capital, and the disruption of the carefully managed and manicured city spaces through which those flows can travel. And finally, the reference here to the national flag embroidered with birds demonstrates the aesthetic nature of this disruption. It is located in a challenge to the limitations on what – and more importantly whom – can be seen and heard within the national-public sphere.

Finally, the *loca* assumes significance because she is a desiring subject, and as such, assumes an unambiguously *active* role within Lemebel’s work. In her active expression of desire, the *loca* resists the fixity of identity that is allocated or distributed by power. Instead Lemebel’s desiring subjects make a claim to their own subjectivity, in what I describe below as an act of disidentification that aligns closely with Rancière’s concept of subjectivation. Desire enacts a dissensual relationship with heteronormativity:

¿Y usted?  
¿Qué hará con ese recuerdo de niños  
Pajeándonos y otras cosas  
En las vacaciones de Cartagena? (1996: 81)

The memory of the homosexual encounter between boys disrupts the attempted occlusion of any gendered identities that break with the strict masculine-feminine divide. In a further rejection of gendered division, in much of Lemebel’s work, the desiring subject additionally shifts away from the hyper-valorisation of the phallus as a (Lacanian) signifier of dominance or authority, with his writings celebrating instead the anus – the *ano* or *culo*. In ‘Manifiesto’, Lemebel describes the association of homosexual desire with the alternative signifier of the anus:

Mi hombría es aceptarme diferente  
Ser cobarde es mucho más duro  
Y no pongo la otra mejilla  
Pongo el culo compañero  
Y ésa es mi venganza (1996: 83)

The performance of sexual identity that is focused in the anus is here both the expression of difference that expresses a politicised position, and the assertion of a dissensual ‘revenge’ upon the status quo. As I go on to discuss, Lemebel’s focus on the anus functions to visibilise and contest the frequently violent symbolic codings founded in the phallus. Beneath the stark



divisions of gender and gendered sexual identity, and beyond phallic dominance, Lemebel suggests, lies a hidden tenderness that is located in the contact between desiring subjects, both physical and emotional, in the space of being-together.

Just two years previously, in 1984, Néstor Perlongher notably raised very similar questions about identity, sexuality, and desire, in his essay entitled ‘El sexo de las locas’, published originally in *El Porteño* in May 1984, and reprinted in the collection *Prosa plebeya* (1997a). In this essay, as throughout his work, Perlongher engages with a similarly paradoxical desire to employ dissensual subject positions in defiance of the status quo, and an awareness of the perils implicit in the engagement of any form of identity politics. In ‘El sexo’, Perlongher argues that identity politics arises from a fear of persecution, since an identitarian affiliation provides the illusion of togetherness and of strength – ‘ante la persecución, lo instintivo es refugiarse’ (1997a: 32). However, this tactic carries with it an implicit risk:

El riesgo, es que se apunta a la constitución de un territorio homosexual – una especie de minisionismo – que conforma no una subversión, sino una ampliación de la normalidad, la instauración de una suerte de normalidad paralela, de una normalidad dividida entre *gays* y *straights*. (Ibid: 32-3)

In other words, the hierarchical nature of the social is not undone by identity politics founded in sexual preference. Indeed, such a political strategy can only ever be exclusionary, operating to control and oppress through its ordering function and ghettoization of difference. Perlongher appeals to a Foucauldian historicisation of sexuality in his critique of the utilisation of identity as a basis for political action. Such an ordering, he argues:

Diferencia a los sujetos según sus goces: homosexual o heterosexual, vaginal o clitoridiano, anal o bucal, por el pene o por el dedo gordo. La pretensión de definir a un sujeto conforme a su elección de objeto sexual es mitológica, pero es una mitología que funciona. No funciona desde hace tanto tiempo, es cierto: por ejemplo, la noción de *homosexualidad* es literalmente inventada en el siglo XIX –fruto de una combinatoria del saber médico y el poder de policía. (Ibid: 32)

His suggestion, therefore, is that rather than thinking sexuality in terms of fixed subject positions that reinforce hierarchies, divisions, and dichotomies, we ought to think sexuality (homo or hetero) ‘no como identidades, sino como devenires. Como mutaciones, como cosas que nos pasan. Devenir mujer, devenir loca, devenir travesti’ (Ibid: 33). The affiliations with the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari here are clear, although for Deleuze and Guattari, the becoming-woman is not a goal or end in itself, but rather acts as a gateway –

because ‘woman’ is a subject-position of implicit minority – to a flight towards endless other minoritarian becomings. This concept of the minoritarian is first articulated in *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature* (1986), in which Deleuze and Guattari point to the specifically political nature of what they delineate a ‘minor literature’. According to their conception, a minor literature functions to deterritorialise language, and to resist codification or fixed interpretations. In order to evade the territorialisation of power, the minor instead seeks escape through nomadic lines of flight. The idea of becoming-minor and the nomadic subject is further developed in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), with the description of various other becomings – becoming-woman, becoming-animal, becoming-intense, becoming-imperceptible. These minoritarian becomings play a vital role in Deleuze and Guattari’s theoretical edifice, as well as being taken up by more recent thinkers such as Hardt and Negri, whose concept of the ‘multitude’ I discuss in further detail below.

In Perlongher’s early work, however, the becoming-woman does not operate as a gateway to other minoritarian becomings, but rather *is itself* the political position. This should not be confused with a politicisation of the state of being-woman. Rather, Perlongher is concerned precisely with the process of becoming in opposition to any fixity of being or identity. In ‘El sexo’, this becoming is related to a drive towards not only gendered, but also sexual disidentification. While normalising models, based on identity politics, can only ever be exclusionary,

El sexo de las locas, que hemos usado de señuelo para este delirio, sería entonces la sexualidad loca, la sexualidad que es una fuga de la normalidad, que la desafía y la subvierte. Locas bailando en las plazas, locas yirando en puertas de fábrica, locas *haciendo cola* en los bañitos. Hablar del sexo de las locas es enumerar los síntomas –las penetraciones, las eyaculaciones, las erecciones, los toques, las insinuaciones– de una enfermedad fatal: aquella que corroe a la normalidad en todos sus wings. (1997a: 33)

This citation highlights Perlongher’s appeal to the philosophical terminology employed by Deleuze and Guattari. The ‘fuga’ recalls the Deleuzian ‘line of flight’, while Perlongher’s celebration of the free, directionless movement of the dance suggests the rhizomatic subversion of the vertical or hierarchical. Furthermore, the *loca* here proliferates difference, overcoming binaries by her endless ‘síntomas’, which mirrors Deleuze and Guattari’s rejection of any universal semiotic system to explain and codify reality.

For Perlongher, the *loca* is not only the figure of sexual non-normativity, she is also the figure of unbridled sexuality, and of fantasy and desire. She therefore operates as a point of dissensus based on the sexual, while also moving sexuality beyond identity. As in the case of

Lemebel, Perlongher focuses on desire as a crucial aspect of political expression in his work, linking it to the political and social reality of Argentina, as well as to dictatorship. At the time of writing, Perlongher asserts in ‘El sexo’,

Hablar de homosexualidad en Argentina no es sólo hablar de goce sino también de terror. Esos secuestros, torturas, robos, prisiones, escarnios, bochornos, que los sujetos tenidos por ‘homosexuales’, padecen tradicionalmente en la Argentina – donde agredir putos es un deporte popular – anteceden, y tal vez ayuden a explicar, el genocidio de la dictadura. (1997a: 30)

The replacement of desire and sexual gratification with pain and torture is part of a broader occlusion of the body as instrument of pleasure from the public sphere. The body is obsessively controlled and limited, inexplicably so according to Perlongher. He queries ‘¿De dónde viene esa infatigable preocupación por los culos – o las lenguas – ajenas?’ (Ibid: 31). However, the liberation of desire is not only a homosexual issue. In the first place, because, as Perlongher discusses earlier in the essay, homosexuality has no implicitly revolutionary drive, but can function to reinforce the relational status quo just as much as any heteronormative relationship. And secondly, because the pursuit of singular desire is a universally human concern. And just as Lemebel seeks the tenderness in relationality (‘Y no hablo de meterlo y sacarlo/ Y sacarlo y meterlo solamente/ Hablo de ternura compañero’ [1996: 82]), Perlongher locates love as a powerful political force: ‘El amor, a la manera de los románticos, hace saltar las convenciones sociales, las clasificaciones’ (1997a: 32). There are then notable resonances in the work of both Lemebel and Perlongher, particularly in their linking of desire, the sexual body, and the dissensual subject position with a radical politics. Both authors are also concerned with new conceptions of relationality in post-dictatorship reality, and both locate a feminised tenderness as the basis for a politicised community of being-together without identitarian limitations.

Both Lemebel’s and Perlongher’s distrust of identity politics should be placed in its social and political context. In the first place, their work arises in the wake of the development of identity politics – the assumption of a group identity based on a shared experience of injustice – that became a dominant form of political resistance from the 1960s. In Latin America, such strategic identifications formed the basis for the foundation of the ‘new social movements’ which continue to receive much critical validation. Jon Beasley-Murray offers a critique of the leftist understanding of (identitarian) new social movements as embodying an anti-hegemonic discourse. His contention in *Posthegemony* (2010) is that civil society theory, which posits itself as a counter-hegemonic project through its championing of

the new social movements, is politically flawed. In Latin America, civil society is frequently understood to have a uniquely democratising potential, with a consequent increasing institutional support base. Yet according to Beasley-Murray, the fetishization of identitarian civil society quickly becomes a tool of the neoliberal state. However, I contend that a consideration of identity (politics) in relation to homosexuality requires a somewhat different focus, owing to the specificities of homosexual rights claims, both in Latin America and elsewhere, and to the widespread theoretical shift from an identitarian gay rights movement to an (often desexualised) disidentitarian theorization of the queer. In a discussion of sexual desire and sexual behaviours, it is important to stress the differences between attitudes in Europe and North America and those of Latin America: this difference, which is partly related to culture and partly to the economic climate, means that the socio-political priorities of homosexuals across the North-South divide do not always match up. This is the subject of much of Lemebel's work, which demarcates the chasm between the spectacle of neoliberal consumer culture and the marginal reality of life in Chile, as well as questioning the significance of certain highlights of gay rights activism in the North – such as the Stonewall riots of 1969 – to the lived experience of the Latin American *maricón* or *loca*.

LGBT rights in Latin America are categorised by Javier Corrales and Mario Pecheny as being 'uneven and late' in their progression (2010: 2). Uneven development of these rights is related to culture, ethnicity, and geography, as well as to the 'uneven modernity' often evoked as being characteristic of Latin America.<sup>34</sup> The belated nature of LGBT rights acquisition compared to many other democratic nations across the world is of a particularly marked nature in Latin America when contrasted with the success of other social movements in the region. This lateness can be explained in part by cultural precedents and in part by political context. In Argentina and Chile under dictatorship for instance, as might be expected, gay rights were minimal and homosexuals were subject to violent repression. Furthermore, as David William Foster points out, in Argentina, not only those identifying as homosexual, but also all symbolic underpinnings of non-normative sexuality, became the

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<sup>34</sup> José Joaquín Brunner, for example, describes the experience of 'cultural heterogeneity' and 'peripheral modernity' in the 1993 article 'Notes on Modernity and Postmodernity in Latin America'. Brunner writes that since Latin Americans are 'Condemned to live in a world where all the images of modernity and modernism come to us from the outside and become obsolete before we are able to materialize them, we find ourselves trapped in a world where not all solid things but rather all symbols melt into air. Latin America: the project of echoes and fragments, of past utopias whose present we can only perceive as a continuous crisis. This sensation of the permanent crisis of everything, of the economy, institutions, political regimes, universities, art, public services, private enterprise, the armed forces, poorly and barely hides the fact that we live and think in the middle of a modernity in the process of construction, whose dynamic is increasing the heterogeneities of our very perceptions, knowledges, and information'. (1993: 53)

subject of attack:

the military regime persecuted an array of signs that it considered to be evidence of sexual deviancy, one major cluster of which was attributed to homo-sexuality: unsomber clothing, long hair, overt body language, manifest partialities toward certain types of music in certain types of public or semi-clandestine spaces, and a generally non-masculinist person. (2001: 443)

Yet neither did a left-wing progressive politics imply a liberal attitude towards non-normative sexual behaviour. Castro's Cuba had, by the time in which both Perlongher and Lemebel were writing, become infamous for imprisoning homosexual men in forced labour camps, thereby complicating a queer affiliation with leftist movements across the region. At the same time in Argentina, even left-Peronism wholeheartedly rejected the affiliation of the FLH – the *Frente de Liberación Homosexual* – of which Perlongher was a key member. As Ben Bollig documents, Perlongher continued to seek an association for the groups that shared many of their political visions, insisting for instance that 'the FLH attend the demonstrations to welcome back General Juan Perón at Ezeiza airport in 1973', yet the group had already in 1970 been rejected by the Peronist Youth, and validation from Peronism in general was never forthcoming (Bollig, 2008: 2). Bollig speculates that multiple socio-political reasons underlie this rejection of non-normative sexual practice from a left wing that is otherwise more predictably socially liberal: 'This was perhaps due to the general machismo in Argentina politics, or to suspicion about homosexuality as being bourgeois decadence or a possible weak link in political activism, making a party member potentially subject to blackmail or coercion' (Ibid: 140).<sup>35</sup> Within this social and historical context, therefore, it was possible to argue that artwork that merely worked to visibilise non-normative sexuality could itself function to permit a broadening of the audible and visible within the public sphere. However, subsequent socio-political developments functioned to complicate this seemingly straightforward relationship between the manifestation of transgressive desire and a radical politics.

In the 1980s, two principal changes affected the possibilities for the articulation of LGBT rights in Chile and Argentina. In the first place, the transition to democracy continued (and further developed) the neoliberal political economy that had previously characterised the dictatorships in both countries. Democracy brought with it a generalised social liberalisation,

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<sup>35</sup> The latter concern presumably the result of an overwhelming social proscription of homosexuality in Argentina at the time.

and homosexuality became more widely accepted, with LGBT rights groups assuming a more visible and vigorous role within public life. However, this shift coincided with a market-driven commodification of difference, such that the latter's political potential as a category of dissensus was compromised. As Francine Masiello writes in *The Art of Transition*, 'As the market becomes the new arena for the promotion and sale of "difference," alternative gendered identities lose their potential thrust and are often considered commodities or tokens of exchange' (2001: 16). At around the same time, the AIDS crisis caused devastation among the homosexual community, such that an uncomplicated celebration of the political potential of non-normative sex no longer seemed possible. The AIDS crisis marks the point in Perlongher's work, for instance, where unbridled desire is no longer presented as the focus for a utopian imagining of a non-normative community, and where the author begins to shift instead towards an exploration of esoteric religion and mystic spirituality. Of course, beyond the specific problems associated with a celebratory identification with a gay 'essence', identity politics of any kind can be understood as problematic, not only because of the phenomenon of the marketisation of difference, but also because such political positioning inevitably reinvigorates hierarchy. As Leo Bersani writes in *Homos*, 'this valorizing of particular communitarian – and cultural – identities in turn privilege[s] difference over sameness in human relations, thus condemning the social to repeated efforts to overcome the trauma of difference as well as to a dependence on such weak cohesive values as a mere tolerance for diversity' (2010: 87). In the decades of Lemebel and Perlongher's most prolific literary production, therefore, the politics of (gay) identity became problematic, and 'gay' theory morphed into an often de-sexualised 'queer' theory. But, as I discussed in the introduction to this chapter, even queer anti-identitarianism can also run the risk of being reified into a kind of non-identity (rather than the more radical disidentity of subjectivation which, as I outline below, more closely aligns with the political positioning of both Lemebel and Perlongher).

There are, then, two principal problems associated with utilising the framework of identity and difference for a consideration of the politics of Lemebel and Perlongher. In the first place, following the argument of Masiello (among others), the political force of difference collapses in the face of the neoliberal marketplace which is able to assimilate all challenges based on difference into its all encompassing global logic, while at the same time actually profiting from such challenges. In the second place, identity – even where it is aggressively non-identitarian – runs the risk of reifying communities of belonging that mirror the formation of the nation-state on a microcosmic level. In other words, they remain tied to

the capitalist institution as it is parsed through the state. Meanwhile, as I go on to demonstrate, both Perlongher and Lemebel work towards the imagining of a radical politics that is not dependent upon the state and its thrall to the global capitalist marketplace. In their engagement with disidentitarian figures that challenge the political limitations of both identity and difference, I locate a resonance with the Rancièrian notion of subjectivation.

In a 1992 essay entitled ‘Politics, Identity, and Subjectivization’, Rancière delineates the latter term as ‘the formation of a one that is not a self but is the relation of a self to an other’ (1992: 60). Subjectivation is the dis-identitarian or de-classificatory drive that links people only because of their in-betweenness – because of their status as outsider, or because they have no part in policy/police. On the other hand, Rancière writes that:

Political subjectivization is the enactment of equality – or the handling of a wrong – by people who are together to the extent that they are between. It is a crossing of identities, relying on a crossing of names: names that link the name of a group or class to the name of no group or no class, a being to a nonbeing or a not-yet-being. (Ibid: 61)

Subjectivation is both the denial of an identity (that given by the police that names and orders), and the staging of a common place not based on consensus but on an ‘impossible identification’ with the otherness that has no part (Ibid: 62). In other words, political subjectivation is, fundamentally, a relational proposition. It is furthermore founded in and inseparable from equality as axiom. The presupposition of equality, for Rancière, *is* the democratic political act because it interrupts the police order, demonstrating the contingency of its hierarchical structure. In other words, the assertion of equality as political act disrupts the sensible order, forcing its redistribution along different lines. As part of the process whereby equality is asserted, the political collective comes into being through a process of subjectivation. I argue that the *locas*, *maricas*, and *travestis* in the works of Lemebel and Perlongher enact this process of subjectivation, both in their endless disidentificatory drive, and in their conception of being-together, or relationality, made possible by their position as permanent outsiders.

### ***The Ciudad-ano***

Lemebel’s post-dictatorial textual production is frequently focused on the continuity between dictatorship and democracy, critiquing the neoliberal economic policies that are at

the centre of both. The nominal democracy of the post-dictatorship is, for Lemebel, flawed since it is founded in a consensus that relies upon inequality and exclusion. Lemebel's act of dissensual rebellion against this non-democratic configuration of democracy is to create a textual space in which the excluded *demos* can disrupt the distribution of the sensible in the name of a collective wrong. This works in particular through the relationships he sketches between the (corporeal) people and the (lettered) city,<sup>36</sup> with the former able to disrupt the latter's connection to power and control. During the Chilean dictatorship, as described above, Lemebel's principal artistic output emerged from his role in the performance group *Las Yeguas del Apocalipsis*, for whom the body operated as canvas for the artwork. Yet while Lemebel returns to the written word in the aftermath of dictatorship, publishing several collections of *crónicas* and a novel (*Tengo miedo torero*) between 1995 and 2005, the artist's concern with the body has not diminished in the movement of his art from the corporeal to the lettered. Through foregrounding desire as an impulse to action, and re-writing normative constructions of sexuality with an insistence on the orifice rather than the phallus, Lemebel continues to privilege the corporeal as a site of political dissensus, and as a valid means of experiencing and writing the polis. Lemebel's focus on the ways in which bodies are constrained within the public space and within the public imagination, as well as the visions for escape or flight that he portrays, highlights the refusal of his dissensual subjects to be assigned a proper role or place within the polis. His transgressive subjects resist any assignation to the proper, and the re-signified, disidentitarian body plays a vital role in contesting hegemonic neoliberal representations of the urban space and its inhabitants.

The subject's desire to escape from the ordering of places and roles in the polis is the subject of Lemebel's 'Corazón vudú' (*Adiós mariquita linda*). This *crónica*, which begins with a strongly corporeal orientation thanks to the location of the author seated on the 'trono fecal', describes a trip to Arica in which Lemebel is to be interviewed on television. Instead of dutifully presenting himself to interview, the fictional Lemebel begins to drink whisky, and from there, the focus of the trip changes dramatically. After an evening of excess, he is sent to bed, and shut 'a la fuerza [...] con llave en la habitación' (2005: 41). The narrative

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<sup>36</sup> The concept of the lettered city is developed by Ángel Rama in his seminal text *La ciudad letrada*, which charts the historical association of writing (specifically urban planning and legislation) with the dominant regime of power and knowledge, arguing that the new cities in the New World were envisioned by the European monarchies as unique opportunities for implementing hierarchical geographical orderings which would permit the implementation of colonial mechanisms for subjugation and the maintenance of dominant structures of control: 'Las regirá una razón ordenadora que se revela en un orden social jerárquico transpuesto a un orden distributivo geométrico' (1984: 4). The rational ordering of signs in the urban environment was designed to mirror a similarly rational ordering of hierarchical reality, and hence the early administrators of the New World cities were all writers of some kind: the *letrados*.



voice goes on to describe a flight that is both literal and figurative. The narrator simultaneously performs an escape from the hotel room *and* from the boredom of routine, from the functionalism of the capitalist market, and from the triteness of duty, and toward the sensuality of musical rhythms, the blissful self-forgetfulness at the bottom of the bottle, and the eroticism of the sexual encounter.

Y allí sólo, con ese cálido arenal ariqueño carnavalesando el viernes, además con todo ese whisky en el cuerpo, qué diazepam podía funcionar, ¿cómo iba a dormir?, tampoco podía concentrarme en el tevé cable, porque afuera, a lo lejos, casi confundido con el rumor metálico del Pacífico: Óigame compai, seguía escuchando la música, aunque en el resort la fiesta había terminado. Óigame compai, esos hoteles cuicos siempre están al borde de la playa, tienen piscina y son bajos, de un solo piso. Óigame compai, la música se escuchaba clarita, venía de la playa, no sé, de alguna fiesta que había cerca. Óigame compai, la ventana estaba abierta y las burbujas azules de la noche me invitaban a escaparme en busca de unos ojos de ágata dulce, que me hicieran olvidar el dolor. (2005: 41)

Here, desire becomes the impulse to the narrator's action, overriding the internalised conformity to hegemonic normativity that characterises the disciplined citizen. And in these Dionysian wanderings – 'la pulsión dionisiaca del desvío' as Lemebel writes elsewhere (2000: 87) – through the urban environment, the sensible distribution invisibly maintained by the police order is challenged and undermined. Traversing the city on currents of nomadic desire, Lemebel's characters trace new urban cartographies, and in the process the traditional *ciudad letrada* is reconfigured according to a newly politicised aesthetic of the erotic, becoming instead a *ciudad-ano*.

This dissensual acting out of place is, I argue, a symptom of a broader disidentitarian drive in the work of Lemebel, and yet it is paradoxically also dependent upon an engagement with specific marginalised sexual identities. While Perlongher writes under the explicitly Deleuzian paradigm of becoming-minoritarian, Lemebel engages more generally with the adoption of a series of marginal subject positions. In particular, the writer performs not only a becoming-woman but a specific alliance with the feminine in similar terms to those proposed by Nelly Richard in her text *Masculine/Feminine*. According to Richard, the feminine represents an important mediating point in the destabilising of the signs of power, owing to its position of institutionalised marginality. The 'insubordinate sign' of the neo-avant-garde is understood by Richard as a hyper-feminine writing: the 'semiotic-feminine that explodes the sign and transgresses the paternal closure of monological significations' (2004a: 21). The excessive, the erotic, and the poetic all represent vital aspects of these linguistic and artistic

‘rebellious surpluses’ which serve a deregulative function with regard to the totalising masculine symbolic regime. Lemebel’s *locas* performatively assume their feminised subjectivity to a similarly dissensual end. As the author writes in the chronicle ‘Loco afán’ from the collection of the same name: ‘Devengo coleóptero que teje su miel negra, devengo mujer como cualquier minoría. Me complicito en su matriz de ultraje, hago alianzas con la madre indolatina y «aprendo la lengua patriarcal para maldecirla»’ (2000: 124). Not only does the ‘devenir mujer’ here suggest that this alliance takes place under similar terms as those of a Deleuzean minority, echoing Perlongher’s use of the same theory (see below), but Lemebel also clearly introduces a post-colonial argument in his text, with the indirect citation of Fernández Retamar’s ‘Calibán’<sup>37</sup> making this context explicit, although clearly Lemebel’s vision of the calibanesque *loca* departs radically from the hyper-macho *nuevo hombre* tacitly endorsed by Fernández Retamar.

The undermining of ‘la lengua patriarcal’ here is not only performed as a counter to heteronormative phallogocentrism, therefore, but additionally as a counter to the imposition of a globalised homosexual culture that reifies identities and reinscribes the binary structures of sexuality and desire that it purports to challenge. This explicitly post-colonial context for Lemebel’s work represents one notable difference between his creation of a political space in the text and the vision of the political in left-queer thought – namely, the challenge Lemebel offers to the idea of a *global* queer imaginary. Not only do the *locas* performatively question – in line with queer theory – the distribution of sexual and gendered roles and parts that functions to exclude and hierarchically order, but they also challenge the hegemony of the US-imported model of homosexuality with its insistence on the masculinity of the gay male.<sup>38</sup> In counterpoint to the culturally dominant model, *loca* culture still offers, according to Lemebel writing in ‘Nalgas lycra, sodoma disco’, ‘un folclor mariposón que decora la cultura homo’ (2000: 59). In this *crónica*, it is significant that the *locas* always *almost* assume the identity to which they aspire. They are ‘casi reinas’, ‘casi estrellas’, ‘casi jóvenes’, ‘casi

<sup>37</sup> In the essay ‘Calibán’, Cuban thinker Roberto Fernández Retamar notably sketches the intellectual history of Shakespeare’s character Caliban (*The Tempest*) in Latin America. From being the symbol of Latin America’s barbarism in José Rodó’s 1900 essay ‘Ariel’, Caliban becomes for Fernández Retamar a model for a post-colonial wresting of power: ‘Nuestro símbolo no es pues Ariel, como pensó Rodó, sino Calibán. [...] Próspero invadió las islas, mató a nuestros ancestros, esclavizó a Calibán y le enseñó su idioma para poder entenderse con él: ¿qué otra cosa puede hacer Calibán sino utilizar ese mismo idioma —hoy no tiene otro— para maldecirlo, para desear que caiga sobre él la “roja plaga?” No conozco otra metáfora más acertada de nuestra situación cultural, de nuestra realidad. [...] ¿Qué es nuestra cultura, sino la historia, sino la cultura de Calibán?’ (2003: 42)

<sup>38</sup> For Lemebel, US homosexual culture repeats the binarisms of gendered identity with its ‘toneladas de músculos y físicoculturas, en minishort, peladas y con aritos’, looking down on their Chilean counterpart, ‘tan re fea y arrastra[ndo] por el mundo su desnutrición de loca tercermundista’ (2000: 71).

chiquillas’ yet there is always a qualifying ‘si no fuera por...’ (Ibid: 57). Always out of place, these subjects disrupt the roles they are assigned within the polis, and as such, work to open up a uniquely political space. For the ‘if only’ is not an expression of the *locas*’ failure, but is rather the embodiment of Lemebel’s political disidentitarian drive:

Si no fuera por eso, por esa brasa de la fiesta cola que el mercado gay consume con su negocio de músculos transpirado. Acaso sólo esa chispa, ese humor, ese argot, sean una distancia politizable. (Ibid: 59)

The political is founded here in the opening up of a ‘distancia’ within the order of the city precisely by the identity in conflict expressed by Lemebel’s sexual subjects. In making visible the distance between assigned identity and the subject’s own claimed identification/subjectivation, the out-of-place subject demands a place, that is, demands political equality.

For Lemebel, the sexual and corporeal are particularly effective tools to claim this political space founded in equality because of their unique ability to demonstrate the contingent nature of the hierarchical ordering of the polis. In particular, the anus acquires a particular significance throughout his work, able to deconstruct not only the artificially ordered city, but also the symbolic regime of phallogocentrism which, according to Lemebel’s account, has now crept into homosexual relationships as well as heterosexual. In ‘Ojos de trasnochado mirar’ (*Adiós mariquita linda*), Lemebel describes this shift in the codings of power in homosexual relations: where once clients used to pay for temporary possession of the phallus of the other – ‘un cliente, una vieja loca jubilada que reservaba unas monedas de su mísera pensión para cancelarle al cafiiche una mamada sin dientes’ (2005: 176) – they now pay for the right to penetrate, thereby asserting their own position of power over the other:

Total, ya pasó la época en que el activo montador valía oro, cobraba en oro, se hacía pagar muy bien sus atributos erectos. Ahora, el cambalache neoliberal de los cuerpos prostitutos relativizó el valor del falo diamante por la plusvalía del otro masculino. (Ibid: 177)

Lemebel notes this shift while working to comprehensively undermine it throughout his work in the unequivocal privilege he affords the anus over the phallus. Challenging the association of phallus-power-order, Lemebel creates new cartographies of desire based not on the phallic but on the orificial. Rather than entry into the polis being guaranteed by the right to penetrate

the other,<sup>39</sup> the new city imagined by Lemebel is accessed via the celebratory symbol of the anus. And this re-centring of the anus operates both as a post-colonial valorisation of Latin American specificity in counter to a globalised queer theory, and as a challenge to neoliberal consensus politics. The homoerotic cartographies which Lemebel's *locas* trace in their wanderings undermine the masculine conception of space which, according to Henri Lefebvre, is symptomatic of capitalist hegemony. In his theoretically dense and philosophically wide-ranging text *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre argues that all space is socially produced, and as such, provides vital information about the society which has constructed it in such a way: 'the space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and action; [...] in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power' (1991: 26). Spatial production in the contemporary era (capitalism) represents and assigns specifically hierarchical positions to '*biological reproduction*', '*the reproduction of labour power*', and '*the reproduction of the social relations of production*' (Ibid: 32, emphasis in original). The re-appropriation of space which Lemebel undertakes through the spatialisation of the sexualised (and specifically homosexual) body operates against this vertical, phallogentric privileging of the (re)productive and disrupts the related hierarchical distribution of urban reality, offering a new relationality based on the pleasure of the erotic encounter with sameness rather than the relations of labour exchange demanded by capitalism.

In Rancière's thought, the production of space for the maintenance of hegemonic control under capitalism is primarily concerned with the ordering of bodies, and Lefebvre highlights a similar concern, whether that be with the labouring body or the reproducing body. Lefebvre characterises a significant difference between the organism that *lives* and that which merely *survives*, arguing that this difference is found in the latter's ability to create surplus energy that must then be expended in a new type of productivity – in play, or the erotic:

In effect, energy must be *wasted*; and the explosive waste of energy is indistinguishable from its productive use: beginning on the plane of animal life, play, struggle, war and sex are coextensive. Production, destruction and reproduction overlap and intersect. (1991: 177)

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<sup>39</sup> See, for instance, Leo Bersani's reflection on David Halperin's text *Saint Foucault*, in which he points to the integral place the sexual body has historically occupied in determining the boundaries of the political: 'The ancient Greek model, as both Foucault and David Halperin describe it, made for a brutal reduction of the person to his sexual behavior: phallic penetration of another's body not only expressed virility but was also a sign of social superiority, an expression of something we might call the (male) citizen-essence' (2010: 39). In other words, phallic penetration of another is equivalent to entry into the *polis*, whereas to be penetrated is to lose one's position amongst those who, in Rancière's terminology, have a part.

Social space attempts to control the energies and drives of the living, Dionysian body through prohibition and prescription, which are particularly linked to familial space, represented architecturally in housing. The urban space and the division of labour under the capitalist system tends to fragment the body, and to fracture its relationship to the Ego or self. In the shift from natural space to the space of the capitalist polis, the body is castrated and subject to a perpetual surveillance, and any excess or waste produced in the process is reabsorbed and transformed into surplus value.

Space produced in the capitalist era is termed by Lefebvre ‘abstract’ space, as opposed to ‘absolute’ space, which is natural space, or a space produced from the residues of nature. Abstract space is founded upon ‘the vast networks of banks, business centres and major productive cities, as also on motorways, airports and information lattices’ (1991: 53), and its expansion, according to Lefebvre, can only be prevented by class struggle and subsequent (temporary) re-appropriations of space. The spatial economy of abstract space valorises and legitimises certain relationships of production and reproduction, and requires a consensus about the appropriate use of any given location. It is thus predicated on certain prohibitions and rejections which must be maintained if the hegemony of capitalism is to stand unchallenged. Abstract space, which utterly removes nature from representations of space, is governed by the dual masters of the Phallus and the Eye. These two symbols preside over the capitalist space par excellence, which is designed for the accumulation of wealth only, and functions to homogenise all that which differs from its representational imaginary, which ‘presupposes and implies a logic of visualisation’:

The arrogant verticality of skyscrapers, and especially of public and state buildings, introduces a phallic or more precisely a phallogentric element into the visual realm; the purpose of this display, of this need to impress, is to convey an impression of authority to each spectator. (Ibid: 98)

The visual production of space which characterises the abstract supersedes the body, and visualisation is linked by Lefebvre to abstraction and authority through phallic visibility. In contrast to this, in the 1995 article ‘Mira que si te quise’, fellow *Yegua* Francisco Casas argues that Lemebel resignifies the corporeal codes of the polis precisely through a rejection of phallic authority, and a simultaneous delight in the excretory, the orificial, and the performance of the body as lack. The subversive sexualities Lemebel portrays undermine the surveillance of the hegemonic regime, and question the normative morals of spectacular society:

La textualidad homoerótica descubre el corpus masculino/lumpen/urbano a partir de las lecturas de sus orificios, dándole otras terminaciones al cuerpo original/cultural, llenando sus «huecos», reinstalando sus funciones polimorfas en complicidad con la madre, devolviéndoles su fragilidad para re-verlo desde ahí. Desposeído del falo simbólico, en ese ahí o «hay», el gesto se torna político desarticulando la lectura de «parodia o doblaje travesti» por la voz agenciada al género y su límite, lo degenerado. (1995: 35)

The performative gender roles which are assumed by Lemebel's *locas* therefore have a political reach beyond the demolition of binary conceptions of sexuality and desire, functioning to make visible the violence of masculine, phallogocentric codings of the neoliberal city, and to replace this symbolic regime with another, based on the hidden feminine beneath spectacular masculinity. In his re-writing of the lettered city through the wanderings of the *locas*, Lemebel operates a subtle dialectic that recognises the tensions inherent in all realities, and that aims to accommodate those tensions at the foundation of its alternative distribution of sensible urban reality. His new chronicling of the urban environment of Santiago, in the context of globalised neoliberalism, creates consciously post-colonial re-imaginings of Latin America which counter the colonial epistles sent from the New World to the Old. Lemebel's Santiago, peopled by desire and fantasy as much as by living beings, is a reconfiguration of the lettered city through sensuality and the body, in which the out-of-place make their claim to an equal place.

### ***The De-Centred Subject***

While for Lemebel, queer subversion of the ordered *polis* arises from a subject position of marginality (specifically, the feminine), in the case of Néstor Perlongher's writing, the textual politics is more closely aligned with the total de-centring of subjectivity, and with a (seemingly paradoxical) reinvestment in materiality, at least in his earlier works. Yet as in Lemebel's work, this begins with an engagement with a performative process of becoming-woman. The clearest example of Perlongher's description of this process can be found in the two poems from the collection *Alambres* that are titled with a female name – 'Ethel' and 'Daisy'. These poems show the performative nature of the flight to minority, which is highlighted in the focus on the accoutrements necessary for becoming in the first poem:

Como en ese zaguán de azulejos leonados

donde ella se ata el pelo con un paño a lunares – y sobresale un pinche  
 como un punto: en el bretel donde el mendigo gira  
 las huellas de los hombros embarrados en la gasa desnuda (1997b: 84)

There is a certain glamour hinted at in the sensual description of luxurious materials, settings, and surfaces, and reinforced in the richness of the poem's assonantal rhyme. Yet Perlongher subtly undermines this effect in his inclusion of the presence of a sense of danger (the 'punto' which the hairpin becomes) and of socio-political deprivation under capitalism (the 'mendigo' who recurs later in the poem). The process of becoming is already, then, figured in ambiguous terms: unlike Lemebel, who frequently invests his *loca* protagonists with a subversive drive that is founded in a humorous, often excessive, obscenity, in Perlongher's poetry, the tragic nature of the required performance of subject positions is combined with a revelling in the sensual excess of materiality more broadly.

The 'punto' in 'Ethel' foreshadows the even more insistent emphasis on violence in 'Daisy', figured around the image of the cut, which is linked both to sexuality and to the trappings of transvestism:

no hay un corte? en esos  
 (botoncitos) nacarados, no hay una navaja que se lima,  
 y mondada  
 se lama? o ese corte, no es el de la 'heridilla' (humo de folio)? (1997b: 85)

The danger is always incipient here, remaining masked behind, yet inseparable from, both sensuous materiality and sexuality: the wound hides amid pearlescent buttons, and the razor blade both pares down and voluptuously caresses the skin. The near-homophone of 'se lima' and 'se lama' draws a clear parallel here between the violent and the sexual, a recurrent theme in Perlongher's work. Yet the imagery of the cut requires a more nuanced reading here, referencing as it does not only a vaguely defined threat and the wounding implicit in performative gender roles, but also a movement towards a de-centred subjectivity that is not confined to the limitations of the individual body. With regard to this poem, Ben Bollig describes the dual implications of what he describes as a 'density of cutting': the focus on the real cutting implicit in the process of trans-gendered becomings, and the 'sartorial efforts' required for the performance of the *travesti* (2008: 136). The performative nature of subjectivity is coupled, as in 'Ethel', with a demonstration of the social constitution of gender. However, the poem also 'displays the cut as an attack on the individual and the limits of the body' (Ibid: 137). In other words, for Perlongher, the transgendered identities he

figures in his representations of becoming-woman are the precursors for a more radical deconstruction of subjectivity. The cut here disrupts the integrity of the border separating one body from another, and exposes the bodily interior to the external world. It thus acts both as a figuration of the violence involved in the discursive construction of gender ideals, as well as being a vital stage in a new conception of relationality that is being advanced on the basis of an encounter between self and other beyond the boundaries both of the physical body and of the external construction of divisions (public/private, self/other and so on).

The relationality that Perlongher proposes throughout his poetic *oeuvre*, signalled here by the dwelling on the multiply-layered cut, relies both on the deconstruction of the limitations of the individual, and on the refusal of fixed categories of identification. To the latter end, Perlongher insistently deconstructs the (gendered) subject positions that are designed to maintain and strengthen hierarchical relationalities (in particular, the division between activity and passivity, and the hierarchical structurings of the family). In his anthropological work Perlongher documents the multiple categorisations that distinguish various types of sexual behaviour, assigning them a discrete subject position based upon the specific use they make of their sexual bodily parts. In the essay ‘Avatares de los muchachos de la noche’, written when Perlongher was finishing his master’s thesis, and containing much of the material that was later published as *O negócio do michê*, the writer documents the various forms of identification ascribed to male prostitutes – ‘*bicha bofe, michê, travesti, gay, boy, tia, garoto, maricon, mona, oko, eré, monoko, oko mati, oko odara* y sus sucesivas combinaciones y reformulaciones (¡un total de 56 nomenclaturas en sólo algunas manzanas!)’ (1997a: 47). He subversively suggests that the multiplicity of names and categories, while intended to divide and hierarchically classify, can itself ‘barroquizar’ the classificatory system such that the illusion of distinct and discrete identification is shattered. The baroque layers of classification arise, Perlongher suggests, from the ‘choque de dos modelos clasificatorios de la homosexualidad masculina’: the archaic model based on a passive/active, *macho/marica* division of roles, and the contemporary, middle-class model putatively based on the equality of partnership: the gay-gay model (Ibid). While any form of classification continues to suggest a sliding scale of masculinity/femininity, with an implicit polarity underlying the contested middle ground, Perlongher insists that the minuscule divisions of nomenclature designate Deleuzian ‘pasajes intensivos’ rather than fixed identities (Ibid: 48). As such, they are open to a subversive resignification in which the individuals can claim their own subjectivity rather than be ascribed identity.

In a similar shift away from the binary division of gender, in Perlongher’s poem ‘El



polvo’ from the collection *Austria-Hungria*, the gendered subject position is destabilised, as is a nominal classification based similarly on duality:

‘*Ya no seré la última marica de tu vida*’, dice él  
 que dice ella, o dice ella, o él  
 que hubiera dicho ella, o si él le hubiera dicho:  
 ‘*Seré tu último chongo*’ –y ese sábado  
 espeso como masacre de tulipanes, lácteo  
 como la leche de él sobre la boca de ella, o de los senos  
 de ella sobre los vellos de su ano, o un dedo en la garganta  
 su concha multicolor hecha pedazos en donde vuelcan los carreros residuos  
 de una penetración: la de los penes truncos, puntos, juncos,  
 la de los penes juntos en su hondura – o perdido acabar  
 albur derrame el de ella, el de él, el de ellaél o élella  
 con sus trepidaciones nauseabundas y su increíble gusto por la asquerosidad  
 su coprofagia. (1997b: 31-2)

Not only does the *marica* (a feminine gay male) become *chongo* (a stud, or hyper-masculine gay male), but the gendered subject pronouns are first of all confused and later conflated (the ‘ellaél’ and the ‘élella’). Furthermore, as Ben Bollig notes in his analysis of this poem, the creation of gender instability in the poem is intensified by the way in which the pronouns are linked to an increasingly subjunctive mood – ‘que hubiera dicho ella, o si él le hubiera dicho’. In Bollig’s terms, these verb forms ‘suggest degrees of possibility rather than stable being, movement rather than fixed positions’ (2008: 133). At the same time, the corporeal and the sexual receive a similarly ambiguous treatment in terms of gender with the reference to ‘leche de él’ suggesting simultaneously breast milk and semen. Finally, in the act of sexual coupling, the body parts are wholly detached from individual subjectivity. The listing of sexualised body parts (‘boca’, ‘senos’, ‘vellos’, ‘ano’, ‘dedo’, ‘concha’, ‘pene’) in rapid sequence suggests a new kind of relationality based on the sexual encounter: one based on the erotic moment or act, rather than on any mental or emotional connection between two fixed subject positions.

In considering the relational value ascribed here to the (homo)sexual encounter, Leo Bersani’s suggestion in *Is the Rectum a Grave?* that gay cruising can be a practice open for subversive political appropriation is useful. According to Bersani, gay cruising can pre-empt a re-thinking of relationality based on the identification with sameness that it implies. Cruising (as a specific form of sexual encounter) is particularly useful to this purpose because it is based on the avoidance of relationships and intimacy, and simultaneously privileges movement over fixity. It thus permits a certain kind of encounter with otherness that brings

into sharp focus the distance – both physical and metaphysical – separating self and other. The erotic contact between self and other is contact between ‘bodies without attributes’, and thus is ‘identity-free contact’. The ‘other’ in the encounter is nothing more than ‘the incarnated shock of otherness’, and therefore in the physical encounter, ‘we relate to that which transcends all relations’ (2010: 61). At the same time, the self is divested of identity, and this is the point at which homosexual desire becomes ‘homoness’ (as is explained in full below). It is precisely this divestment of (ascribed) identity that characterises Perlongher’s becoming-women – the desiring subjects who people *Austria-Hungría* and *Alambres*. Their sexual and sexualised becomings are part of a larger deconstruction: of gendered subject positions, of the borders separating self and other, and of the fixity of individual identity.

Yet simultaneous with this deconstruction of subjectivity and fixed identities, Perlongher reinscribes an insistent messy materiality into his poetry. The stanza quoted from ‘El polvo’ above notably ends with a reference to the physical that is rooted in disgust. This disgust, or *asco*, is located not in opposition to desire, but as its complement, the ‘increíble gusto por la asquerosidad/su coprofagia’. The poetic signification of the consumption of fecal matter here takes to the extreme what I identify as an inscription of borderless or limitless desire in the work of Perlongher. The relationship of desire with the dissolution of borders has a particular political significance because of the way in which Perlongher privileges desiring relationality over desire as a category of gendered or sexual identification. The latter, in fact, is represented by the poet as being potentially complicit with globalised neoliberalism. According to Christian Gundermann, the emphasis on the materiality of the sexual encounter reflects Perlongher’s rejection of neoliberal economic politics and its particular association with queer culture. As Gundermann notes, Perlongher’s writing emerges in the context of the sweeping neoliberal reforms of the Argentine dictatorship and post-dictatorship. Gundermann describes these reforms as characterised by the globalisation of markets, the de-regularisation of wages and working conditions, and the explosion of a consumer culture, fomented by an ‘intensa cultura mediática del deseo’ (2003: 131). Desire (for material goods) becomes the new required mode of operation for the obedient neoliberal subject, who is impelled by consumption above all else. The homosexual (particularly the gay male), Gundermann argues, has become an accepted figure within the neoliberal political economy (notwithstanding the persecution of gays under dictatorship in Argentina) because of the extent to which he has been able to embody this ideology of permanently unfulfilled desire through consumption. Gundermann argues that ‘la homosexualidad llega a ocupar una posición emblemática como puro “deseo del deseo”’ (Ibid). Neoliberal consumption and

(masculine) homosexuality are linked by their distance from the corporeal materiality of (re)production and hence their ‘pure’ relationship with desire. It is this model of homosexuality confirming the neoliberal model of dematerialisation that, Gundermann argues, Perlongher opposes in his work. In contrast to most readings of Perlongher that emphasise his adherence to Deleuzian rhizomatic connections and flows, Gundermann argues that, in opposing this US-imposed politics of desire, Perlongher instead develops ‘un modelo de subjetividad homosexual que *interrumpe* los flujos deseosos’ (Ibid, my emphasis). Gundermann identifies two principal means to achieving this end: an insistence on the materiality of the (deceased) body,<sup>40</sup> and an insistence on ‘prácticas homosexuales que no se conforman con la proyección de una homosexualidad integrada al mercado neoliberal’ (Ibid). This is not to say that Perlongher’s texts do not engage with desire; quite the opposite. Rather, it is the case that ‘el tipo de deseo homosexual que cultivan los textos de Perlongher hace hincapié en el cuerpo en cuanto materialidad crudo y constituye una interrupción metafórica al sistema neoliberal’ (Ibid). Perlongher’s personal politics of desire is therefore one that is designed to interrupt a neoliberal political economy with an emphasis on a ‘materialidad sucia’ (Ibid: 136). Gundermann relates this to a refusal on Perlongher’s part to separate homosexual liberation and the class struggle. Thus the battle against the neoliberal project is waged on two fronts.

Gundermann’s reading here is persuasive, and provides an important insight into a significant point of differentiation between Perlongher’s work and queer theory as developed in the academy. It furthermore reflects aptly on Perlongher’s political position – stringent opposition to neoliberalism – and the space he carves to articulate this within his poetry. However, I additionally locate in Perlongher’s centralisation of the often broken, wounded, disgusting, yet continually desiring body, a drive towards a relationality that once more rejects any possible identitarianism for the deconstructed subjects that are central to his poetry. In the rejection of the very boundaries of the self, the subjects of Perlongher’s poetry not only reject identity, they displace it. In other words, they inhabit the excessive out-of-place that is the Rancièrian location of politics itself.

In returning to a close reading of ‘El polvo’, this connection between uncompromising materiality and the disidentificatory drive of the relational becomes clear. The poem begins with a paradoxical assertion of solitude and (sexual) togetherness:

En esta encantadora soledad

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<sup>40</sup> See, especially, Perlongher’s well-known long-form poem, ‘Cadáveres’ (1997b: 111-123).

-oh claro, estabas sola!-  
 en esta enhiesta, insoportable inercia  
 es ella, es él, siempre de a uno, lo que esplende  
 ella, su vaporosa mansedumbre o vestido  
 él, su manera de tajar los sábados, la mucilaginosa telilla de los sábados (1997b: 31)

This opening stanza emphatically insists upon the solitude of the subject, yet Perlongher quickly goes on to double the gendered pronouns in an apparent description of copulation. Not yet ‘élella’ and ‘ellaél’, the subjects of the poem appear as both masculine and feminine, and are in fact described in terms that approach a stereotypical gendering. The feminine subject is meek and diaphanous, while the masculine subject’s sexual activity is energetic to the point of violence, the sheets ripped and ejaculated upon. Yet the poem moves on from the division of gender and from the expression of the sexual as an individual pleasure – ‘siempre de a uno’ – through the central pronominal linking described above, to a final and total dissolution of identity, gendered or otherwise:

y cuando, tras sus fornicaciones simultáneas, sus rítmicos jaleos y sus exhalaciones de  
 almidón y sus pedos, sus dulcísimos pedos  
 desleída la aurora en la polvera, nada  
 ni nadie pasa (1997b: 32)

The expression of physicality here – in particular the emphasis on sex as a bodily act – represents a hyper-insistence on the material. As I have argued, in Perlongher’s work, this functions as a challenge both to the neoliberal global economy in which empty – and endlessly unfulfilled – desire is centralised and fetishised, and to the de-sexualisation that is a by-product of queer theory’s emphasis on the predominantly discursive nature of sex and gender. The post-coital ‘dulcísimos pedos’ refuse the romanticising of sex that removes it from its physical reality and they also emphasise its normality – ‘nada [...] pasa’. But not only is nothing (out of the ordinary) happening here, but also ‘*nadie* pasa’ (my emphasis). The act of sex and its foundation in a relationality that is essentially the total fusion of two corporeal subjects, has here deconstructed identity to the point of its dissolution. In this way, in their bodily expressions of desire, Perlongher’s poetic subjects refuse any affiliation with identity as ascribed by the state or by society. Instead, they not only claim their own (gendered and sexual) identity, they displace individual identity as a discrete category altogether.

### *Sensible Partitions: Sex and the Body*

Both Perlongher and Lemebel, as I have shown above, resist the assignation of place, and specifically the *proper* place, for the bodies and subjects of their work. In this disidentificatory drive, their work aligns with the radically democratic elements of queer theory, in that it displaces identity as a category of subjectivity. In the first part of this chapter, I located an affinity between this subjectivity-beyond-identity and Rancière's conception of the disidentificatory relation of the *demos* with the police order. The subject of democratic politics is the one who claims his/her identity *in conflict*, in other words, 'floating subjects that deregulate all representation of places and portions' (1999: 99-100). In this sense, the dispute that Rancière places at the centre of politics is one that depends upon subjectivation, or the coming into being of subjects that reject pre-defined identity. Similarly, beyond queer politics or the politics of gender, this displacement of identity enacted in the work of both Lemebel and Perlongher remains central to the politics of their aesthetic. However, as I have also shown, while both authors reject limiting identity assignation, both also place the sexual and desiring body as central to their political aesthetic, and this marks a point of divergence between their work and the Rancièrian theory of subjectivation. As I discussed in the introduction to this chapter, while Rancière reconceives the political as an aesthetic category (concerned with what can be seen, heard, spoken, and thought), and is specifically concerned with the location of the body as a potential force of aesthetico-political disruption, the relationships between desiring bodies has not been considered in his work as a vital facet of this dissensual body-out-of-place. In contrast, for Lemebel and Perlongher, the desiring body itself provides the means of accessing the *improper* that characterises their political vision in and through the artwork. This expansion of the category of the political aesthetic to include also the sexual, I argue, productively complicates the relationship between the two former categories. Such a reading further resists any neat theoretical reading of the texts under study here, and remains true to the limitless queering of boundaries that they represent.

The desiring body, therefore, while not itself a Rancièrian paradigmatic trope, nevertheless forms the central point of analysis for the second part of this chapter. Here, I examine the ways in which Lemebel and Perlongher approach the corporeal and the sexual in their work, with a particular focus on the aftermath of the AIDS crisis of the 1980s. For both writers, this crisis impels a shift in perspective that is most evident in their representations of the body, yet in both cases, the consideration of the subject as both self-defined *and*

relational, remains central to their work. In this insistence upon the relational aspect of disidentity, there are useful parallels to be drawn with Leo Bersani's work on the aesthetic of sex, as expounded in the seminal collection *Is the Rectum a Grave?* (2010). In this work, Bersani seeks to disrupt psychoanalytic theories – those of Freud, Lacan, and Laplanche for example – that argue the case for distinct psychological boundaries between self and other. Such traditional psychoanalysis theorises desire as being intrinsically related to lack, and otherness as a threat to the integrity of the ego, while Bersani suggests that the other can be a non-threatening extension of, or supplement to, the self. The ego dissolution of sexual *jouissance* permits a recognition of the permeability of the boundaries separating self and other, and even of their intrinsic sameness, such that a new kind of nonidentitarian community can be conceived. Bersani seeks to demarcate 'new modes of relationality' in which the self is able to recognise itself in the other, and in the world, a 'relationality grounded in sameness rather than in prejudicial hierarchies of difference' (2010: 87). Rather than the basic hostility which, according to classical psychoanalytic theory, modulates relations between self and world, Bersani suggests that there exists the possibility of an awareness of a feeling-at-home in the world based not on differentiation but on similitude.

Owing to its very nature, the homosexual encounter is a particularly privileged space for this recognition of sameness. Bersani offers as an example a scene from the novel *Funeral Rites* by Genet in which two men have anal sex, and in their positioning, explode the circular, intimate, interior-facing configuration of heterosexual sex.

The renunciation of the couple's oval-like intimacy may be the precondition for a community in which relationality is a function of sameness rather than of hierarchical or antagonistic differences, a community in which we might be indifferent to difference, in which difference, instead of being the valued term, would be the nonthreatening supplement of sameness. (2010: 33)

Bersani argues that the act of sex can help us to think about constructions of selfhood, individuality, and relationality, which he sees as an imperative and urgent project if we are to rethink politics via a reconsideration of our place in the world and our relation to the world. He suggests that the concept of a discrete and singular self is little more than a psychoanalytic 'practical convenience'. (Ibid: 30). In contrast, the aesthetic recognition of the fundamental sameness of self and other 'at once extends a figure and destroys its boundaries, its contained integrity' (Ibid: 35). For Bersani, not only gay sex (as in the text by Genet) but also art characterised by homosexual desire, has a decisive part to play in breaking down 'the defensive formulation of the self-congratulatory ego' (Ibid: 34). This is not a question of

whether the artist is gay or straight, but rather about the presence of what Bersani labels a 'homo-esthetic'.

While Bersani does privilege 'homo-ness', and his earlier text *Homos* was an explicit protest against queer theory's de-gaying and de-sexualisation of homosexuality,<sup>41</sup> he is far from advocating any return to identity politics. However, the question of identity, he suggests, can perhaps most fruitfully be considered with particular regard to gay identity because of the latter's paradoxical nature – 'at once proud and self-erasing' (2010: 38).

At his or her best, the homosexual is a failed subject, one that needs its identity to be cloned, or inaccurately replicated, outside of it. This is the strength, not the weakness, of homosexuality, for the fiction of an inviolable and unified subject has been an important source of human violence. Each monad-like subject – whether it be a personal, ethnic, national, or racial subject – feels obliged to arm itself against the difference embodied in other subjects equally determined to defend their 'integrity' against the Other. It seems that the only way we can love the other or the external world is to find ourselves somehow in it. Only then might there be a nonviolent relation to the world that doesn't seek to exterminate difference. (Ibid: 43)

Bersani's work is, therefore, characterised by a thinking of community as *relationality without identity*. He rejects the categorising impulse of identity to the point that his theory does not afford any ontological privilege to the human over the non-human. 'Homosexuality can first be experienced as a communication of forms, as a kind of universal solidarity not of identities but of positionings and configurations in space, a solidarity that ignores even the apparently most intractable identity-difference: between the human and the nonhuman' (Ibid: 43-4). It is here that the aesthetic nature of Bersani's sexual revolutionising of relations becomes more clearly apparent: it is concerned with forms and their correspondence, and hence is based on the perception of that correspondence. Bersani conceptualises the ego as form, and suggests that an aesthetics of relationality represents the search of the ego for its formal correspondences in the world. This is a further dimension in the process of the self-shattering of the sexual encounter: 'identity-boundaries are violated not only as a masochistic phenomenon, but also as an effect of reaching toward one's own "form" elsewhere. This self-dissolution is also self-accretion; it is self-incremental' (Ibid: 184). Bersani therefore moves away from any straightforward conception of subjectivity, selfhood, or the individual, and suggests that in the aesthetic – and the sexual as a modality of the aesthetic – it might be

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<sup>41</sup> In *Homos*, Bersani wrote that 'the discrediting of a specific gay identity [...] has had the curious but predictable result of eliminating the indispensable grounds for resistance to, precisely, hegemonic regimes of the normal. We have erased ourselves in the process of denaturalizing the epistemic and political regimes that have constructed us' (1995: 4).

possible to form a new understanding of subjectivity that is based on a relationality founded in the recognition of the similitude of forms. He attempts to define us as aesthetic rather than psychoanalytic subjects: through the *homo-esthetic* modality, the self recognises the sameness of the other and the world, thereby gesturing towards a new way of being-together in the world that negates the aggression that, after Freud, characterises the relation of ego and world.

*Homos* was originally published in 1996, in the context of the global AIDS crisis, and it is with this in mind that it is most useful to consider the points of encounter between Bersani's theory of the homo-relation and the way in which relationality is expressed in the post-AIDS work of Perlongher and Lemebel. The discursive constructions of AIDS (by the media) have been analysed extensively as being simultaneously silencing and demonising: those infected with AIDS in the 1980s and 90s were systematically abjected and excluded discursively from the 'general' public, while information about the epidemic was limited, and often erroneous. An extremely thorough account of AIDS representations in the national medias of the US and UK can be found in Simon Watney's text *Policing Desire*, published in 1987 at the height of international panic about the AIDS epidemic. Watney argues that AIDS representations are linked to pre-existing agendas for control over lifestyle and sexuality according to a set of conservative values: 'Aids is effectively being used as a pretext throughout the West to "justify" calls for increasing legislation and regulation of those who are considered to be socially unacceptable' (1987: 3). In other words, AIDS makes visible the hierarchical divisions that offer a place to some members of society while at the same time excluding others. Watney points out that the media produces itself according to the assumption that it addresses a normative, heterosexual general public. It furthermore assumes a paranoid conception of sexuality, and a subsequent hysterical modesty, based upon the notion that sexuality, and especially homosexuality, is contaminating and dangerously, seductively contagious. AIDS does not alter the way homosexuality is coded in the media, it merely intensifies its monstrosity as a perceived threat to the normative institution of the family. The representation (or non-representation) of AIDS and those with AIDS is so significant according to Watney because we 'can only ultimately conceive of ourselves and one another in relation to the circulation of available images in any given society' (Ibid: 8). As such, the global AIDS crisis is indicative of a multiplicity of crises regarding representation and particularly 'the framing of knowledge about the human body and its capacities for sexual pleasure' (Ibid: 9). According to Watney, the body is the constant subject of subjugation by the institutions of our politico-economic system, 'in the various



names of health, beauty, strength, masculinity, fashion, motherliness, respectability, and so on and so forth' (Ibid: 16). However, the media representations of AIDS foreground this corporeal control all the more clearly, since they unanimously work to encourage 'a wholesale de-sexualisation of gay culture and experience' (Ibid: 18). It is the reclaiming of sexuality, sensuality, and fantasy which Watney places as central tenets in his struggle to re-write the narrative of AIDS.

The 'victims' of AIDS represent then a clear instance of the Rancièrian part with no part: not only is their subjectivity denied within the public realm, but their bodies are also made abject to the point that they are considered invisible within the sensible domain of power. Edward Bacal (2013) makes a similar link between this invisibilising of subjects and Rancière's conception of the aesthetic nature of politics, arguing that 'systematic institutional negligence-cum-oppression doubled as the systematic abjection of people with AIDS who, stripped of social and political subjectivity, were actively refused all the fundamental qualities by which subjective identification, social membership, and political representation occur' (2013: 99). The AIDS activism of groups like ACT UP, with its slogan 'Silence=Death', Bacal suggests, functions to return the AIDS body to the public sphere of visibility, expanding the sensible domain to include this part with no part (Ibid: 101). In other words, it acts against the formation of a 'public' based on exclusion of one or more of its parts:

this is a legitimization of the phenomenology of the body with AIDS as a subjective body and, henceforth, as someone with whom another can identify; in this respect, the excluded and abject quasi-body comes to serve as the foundation for the experience and formation of community. (Ibid: 102)

In the same way that these activist groups re-legitimise the infected body by placing it within the public view, I argue that Lemebel and Perlongher work to centralise the materiality of the human encounter in their work, not only in the early years of their poetic and literary production, but also after the spread of AIDS. Their responses to AIDS vary dramatically: while Lemebel continues to revel in the messily material nature of the erotic encounter, albeit with a new centralisation of erotic violence, Perlongher moves his focus away from sexuality and desire, instead emphasising relational connectivity through mysticism. However, I argue that the body no less disappears from his writing than it does from the work of Lemebel, with both writers regrounding writing in lived, embodied experience in order to queer the aesthetic strictures of a reality that continues to categorise, hierarchise, and segregate.

***Desiring Death: Violence and the Erotic***

As I have already described, Lemebel's written production proper began in the 1990s, after the global spread of AIDS had become a devastating reality for homosexuals around the world. This context for the work becomes evident in the fact that even while in many of his *crónicas*, there is an initial seductive appeal to desiring nomadism and *jouissance*, this is frequently followed by an often bloody and violent death. In cases where pleasure and the delight in momentary excess predominate, they are usually foreshadowed by a premonition of horrors to come, or by a disturbing memory of horrors past. The collection *Loco afán*, which most thoroughly explores representations of AIDS and its ramifications for the gay community of Santiago, opens with a chronicle entitled 'La noche de los visones', in which the dictatorship and the AIDS epidemic are conflated in surprising ways. Here, Lemebel foregrounds the dual devastation of subversive corporalities – political dissidents and practising homosexuals – that follows the New Year celebrations of 1972-3. In recounting a Santiago party attended by a group of socially and culturally diverse *locas*, the author metaphorises the coming political disaster in the *locas*' prescient creation of a monument to death and violence:

Por todos lados, las locas juntaban huesos y los iban arreglando en la mesa como una gran pirámide, como una fosa común que iluminaron con velas. Nadie supo de dónde una diablo sacó una banderita chilena que puso en el vértice de la siniestra escultura. (2000: 16-17)

The physicality of the sculpture of bones not only subverts the notion of the celebratory monument supporting and upholding a patriotic discourse of the nation, but also forces the fragmented body back into the public gaze. At the same time, Lemebel's narrative here forces a revision of the imagery of the Chilean flag, with the state and its institutions shown to be literally built on the wreckage of dissenting bodies. Yet as a result of the way that Lemebel uses the description of the party as a metonymic framing of the coup, his figuration of the pile of bones assumes a particular creative political significance. The act of 'arreglando' the bones indicates a political interest in the remainders or residues of violence (as per the argument of Richard discussed in the previous chapters). In Lemebel's vision, the corporeal re-gathering figured here represents a re-capturing of the groundwork for an alternative configuration of bodies and subjectivities.

A similar desire to re-signify fragmentation and corporeal devastation animates the

author's treatment of sexual violence and the sexual transmission of deadly disease. In the first place, it is important to recognise the centrality that violence is afforded in Lemebel's narration of the erotic. Notably, in two later chronicles ('Noche coyote' from the collection *Adiós mariquita linda*, and 'Las amapolas también tienen espinas' from *La esquina es mi corazón*), Lemebel's fictional subjects embody the violence that in his work so frequently succeeds homosexual *jouissance*. In both tales, a desire-inspired nomadism is followed by a violent sexual attack, motivated at least partly in both cases by a post-coital homophobic self-revulsion on the part of the attacker, and a concomitant desire to place the other in the position of the abject. In both cases, it is an alteration in the power balance of the relationship that initiates the violence. In 'Las amapolas', for example, during the sex act, the penetrator expresses an explicit power based on positional superiority, which he locates in his phallic dominance: 'Que te gusta, que te parto, cómetelo todo, que ya viene, que me voy, no te movái, que me fue' (2001: 164). However, after coitus, the vulnerability of the exposed genitals, visible to the anus-eye – the 'pupila ciega que parpadea entre las nalgas' (Ibid: 165) – and the implied loss of masculinity as a result of the homosexual encounter, results in a desire to reassert male power through violence. Simon Watney argues that this kind of all-too-common violence towards the homosexual is motivated primarily by repressed sexual impulses or gender-related anxiety, resulting:

either from reaction-formations developed to defend the individual against some repressed emotion or wish within him or herself, or else from other displaced and strictly speaking phobic anxieties projected onto gay men, about gender, sexual potency or even career prospects. In some cases, as I have suggested, this may be symptomatic of displaced misogyny, with a hatred of what is projected as 'passive' and therefore female, sanctioned by the subject's dominant heterosexual drives. In other cases an over-riding sense of shame concerning excretory functions may be projected onto men (or women) whose sexuality seems to expose and even celebrate the object of disgust which, Freud reminds, us, always also bears the imprint of desire. (1987: 50)

While internalised shame and sexual repression retain a causal relationship with violence against homosexuals, Watney argues that a resurgence in such violence in the 1980s can be linked to representations of AIDS in the international media. In light of this suggestion, the re-metaphorisation of AIDS and its representation undertaken by Lemebel, and his attempt to visibilise the bodies dually disappeared by the military regime and by the initial ravages of AIDS, assume an urgent significance within his new chronicles of the neoliberal city. As Susan Sontag wrote around the same time in *Aids and its Metaphors*, 'the struggle for rhetorical ownership of the illness' can, does, and will affect both personal experiences of

AIDS, and social and medical policy for its treatment and containment (1991: 179). This struggle, in which Lemebel unambiguously participates, has further implications for the quotidian experiences of the queer characters who people his work and the urban space they nomadically occupy.

Lemebel uses AIDS metaphorically in the same way that he uses desire and the sexualised body: to problematise the global flows of the neoliberal free market. In the above-cited 'La noche de los visones', Lemebel locates the mythological source of AIDS in the USA, and compares its spread both to colonialism and to the more recent cultural colonisation of global neoliberalism, positing the illness as a 'recolonización a través de los fluidos corporales' (2000: 22). In the same chronicle, which describes the initial contagions and subsequent transmissions of the illness, the original infection is brought – after first being bought – by *la Pilola Alessandri* from New York: 'Ella *se compró* la epidemia en Nueva York, fue la primera que la trajo en exclusiva, la más auténtica, la recién estrenada moda gay para morir' (2000: 15, my emphasis). In this way, the author traces the flows of cultural imperialism, indicating the complicity of both capitalism and globalised representation in the spread of infection, as well as in the subsequent management of the illness. Another of Lemebel's subjects, *La Chumilou*, contracts AIDS in a prostitutional transaction with a *gringo* whose dollars she is unable to resist in the face of her overwhelming poverty. The symbolic dynamics of this encounter could not be more explicit: social class and socioeconomic status are intrinsically tied to the inability to protect against the negative spreads of global capitalism. The global 'flows' that are celebrated as an indication of a new borderless reality in neoliberal economic theory cannot be separated here from the poisonous side-effects of the new cultural, political, and economic imperialism from the North. Lemebel counters the pernicious influence of neo-imperialism through his calibanesque re-enactment of the pathologisation of the other, this time by that previously pathologised Latin American body who now claims ownership not so much of the illness (as in Sontag) but of its rhetorical power to construct difference.

In addition to contesting traditional metaphoric representations of the illness, its source, and transmission, Lemebel uses the chronicles of *Loco afán* to present a re-scripting of the AIDS death. Simon Watney suggests that apart from caricaturish portrayals of the gay AIDS 'victim' as agent of his own destruction as a result of his immoral promiscuity, the media surround AIDS deaths with a blanket of silence. This silence is then reproduced by the family and friends of those dying from AIDS, who are coerced into 'the shame of guilt by association' (1987: 7). Describing the death of one of his personal friends, Bruno, Watney

finishes the narration with a disclaimer: ‘My friend was not called Bruno. His father asked me not to use his real name. And so the anonymity is complete. The garrulous babble of commentary on Aids constructs yet another “victim”’ (1987: 8). Watney here is essentially narrativising a sensible distribution that ensures the silencing and representational erasure of what Rancière calls the ‘part with no part’: the invisibilisation of AIDS through the censoring of its utterability in both public and private. By contrast, Lemebel’s response to the AIDS tragedy is characterised by an excessive nominalisation, with names multiplying and proliferating to bring personality and individuality back to the dying and deceased subjects. Unlike the discursive constructions that limit access to the public sphere and its sensible domain to subjectivities and bodies that are not abject, Lemebel’s narration is based on a radical equality of access.

Naming brings the AIDS ‘victims’ out of the position of anonymity reserved for them, affording them a place within the public sphere where they previously had none. However, as everywhere in Lemebel’s work, the effect of this proliferation is subtle and itself semantically proliferating, since the profusion of names which multiply around each of the subjects with AIDS both functions to re-personalise, and also crucially avoids fixed nomenclature, and hence fixity of subjectivity. In other words, it claims a place for the subjects named while also insisting on the out-of-place nature of this claiming. The most striking example of how Lemebel’s writing positions itself between the demand for recognition through the reclaiming of names and the simultaneous refusal to fix those names under the sign of an identity is found in the chronicle ‘Los mil nombres de María Camaleón’ from *Loco afán*. Here, the refusal to tie the subject to one single name is partly a defence mechanism for the already threatened gay population of Santiago:

Como nubes nacaradas de gestos, desprecios y sonrojos, el zoológico gay pareciera fugarse continuamente de la identidad. No tener un solo nombre ni una geografía precisa donde enmarcar su deseo, su pasión, su clandestina errancia por el calendario callejero donde se encuentran casualmente; donde saludan siempre inventando chapas y sobrenombres que relatan pequeñas crueldades, caricaturas zoomorfas y chistosas ocurrencias. (2000: 62)

The nominal profusion and excessive heterogeneity permit the subject to describe her own cartographies according to her nomadic wanderings impelled by desire and the search for pleasure – there is no single name (‘nombre’) or place (‘geografía’) to constrict the ‘clandestina errancia’ of the nomadic subject. It furthermore allows the *loca* to dissociate the link between naming and patrimony, since the name of the father is challenged, and replaced

with ‘Una colección de apodos que ocultan el rostro bautismal; esa marca indeleble del padre que lo sacramentó con su macha descendencia’ (Ibid). In privileging nominal profusion over the fixed name of the father, semiotic slippage is championed over fixed symbolism. In other words, a multiplicity of signifiers (the many names) breaks away from the symbolic signified (the subject), and subjectivity becomes something fluid, ambiguous, out-of-place, and out-of-control.

In addition to refusing to allow the continued silencing of the part with no part, throughout his work, Lemebel refuses to abandon the erotic nomadism that precedes violence and disaster. He suggests that the desire for self-annihilation which finds its dual expression in the quest for alcoholic, narcotic, and erotic pleasure which may appear desperate, dehumanising and demeaning<sup>42</sup> can rather be established as the grounds for a subversive moment. The collection *Adiós mariquita linda* is, more than any other, characterised by nomadic wandering motivated by unstoppable desire: neither the prevalence of AIDS and the subsequent policing of desire, nor the earlier dictatorship and its control and restriction of personal freedom, are able to prevent action impelled by a hedonistic lust. As Lemebel writes in ‘Noche payasa’: ‘En ese tiempo, algunas mariquinas hambrientas de culeo express peinaban la ciudad crispada del toque de queda en busca de semen fresco. Y ése era el desafío, agarrar algo justo al borde del peligroso callejeo’ (2005: 164-5). The defiant nature of the sexual encounter is intensified here by Lemebel’s privileging of its momentary nature – the search is for a ‘culeo express’, not a lasting relationship that would mirror the normative social structures of matrimony and the family. The sexual encounter is principally framed by Lemebel as being fleeting, indecipherable, and transitory, and is valued precisely for these qualities.

While it may seem paradoxical that Lemebel links political defiance to the circulation of money and bodies, I contend that beyond the association of erotic pleasures with capitalist systems of exchange, the author posits fleeting sexual interaction as a highly significant encounter between subjects. Lemebel envisages the sexual encounter as a paradigm of a participatory space which opposes the passivity and isolation required for the continued perpetuation of a society dominated by the capitalist spectacle. So while sex is undoubtedly commercialised and packaged for consumption by capitalism as a tool to perpetuate the

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<sup>42</sup> As in ‘Noche quiltra’, also published in *Adiós mariquita linda*, where Lemebel recounts the inevitable slide towards alcoholic oblivion: ‘más tarde que temprano aparece un pisco sin marca que me quema la garganta en la ansiedad de borrarne, de terminar raja y revolcado con el último chico que casi siempre se queda hasta el final’ (2005: 161-2).

latter's global production of surplus-value, Lemebel's writing of the erotic functions differently. The creation of and search for the erotic moment, and of genuine desire through the nomadic wanderings of the text, is in fact an attempt to derail the spectacular imagery which dominates through advertising and the mass media. In the *crónica* 'Barbarella clip' (*La esquina es mi corazón*), sex is shown to be always problematically available for capitalist commodification, leading to a narrowing and normativising of desire. Too much purely spectacular sex perversely leads to a loss of sexuality and desire since extensive media representations of the body essentially function to de-corporealise. Capitalism profits from a body emptied of its corporality, and reduced to a pure sign. Where sex is limited to the spectacular, therefore, it is emptied of its potential political force:

La empresa publicitaria exhibe el cuerpo como una sábana donde se puede escribir cualquier eslogan, o tatuar códigos de precios según el hambre consumista. Pero ese doble de cuerpo, aceitado por el *make-up*, resulta ser a la larga un antídoto contra la sexualidad en la cápsula fría de la pantalla. (2001a: 87)

It is within this context of the globalised, mediatised society of the post-dictatorship that Lemebel notably invests the trope of the eye with paradox and contradiction. This is particularly true throughout the collection *La esquina es mi corazón*, in which the author is concerned both with the process of making visible that which is officially invisible, and simultaneously with the problematic intrusion of the vigilant police order into the private domains of sex and sexuality. Voyeurism is figured complexly therefore as both a source of personal pleasure and of problematic complicity with the controlling eye of the state.

As such, the boundary between the erotic and the pornographic becomes a particularly fruitful locus for Lemebel's political aesthetic. In the chronicle 'La muerte de Madonna' (*Loco afán*), for example, art and the sexual are confounded with dramatic effect:

Y los brazos, y su estómago plano donde la cámara resbala como en un tobogán. Y todos acezantes, los péndex agarrándose sus tulitas verdes. Los más grandecitos sofocado por la excitación de la cámara bajando en silencio por esa piel del vientre. Los pantalones cortos de los Scouts levantando la carpa del marrueco, casi al mismo tiempo que el ojo de la pantalla aterrizando en los pastizales públicos. Todos en silencio, apretados de silencio, pegados a la imagen recorriendo esa selva oscura, ese pliegue falso, esa hendidura de la Madonna conteniendo el aliento, sujetándose la próstata entre las nalgas, simulando una venus pudorosa para las bellas artes, para la cámara que hurga intrusa sus partes pudendas. (2000: 42)

Lemebel's description of the Mapuche Madonna offers numerous pathways to disruption through its camp mixing of registers and imagery. The admixing of high art and popular

culture, a doubly ‘travestied’ Virgin Mary combined with pagan imagery, and the conflation of landscape and body leave nothing sacred or undisturbed. The most significant disruption of all, however, is the sudden intrusion of the phallus. Where the nude female form is an accepted image for art – it can be figured and seen without disrupting the distribution of accepted sensible reality –, the transvestite body is taboo and its exhibition here causes outrage:

Y una y otra vez el miembro reventaba la imagen. Una y otra vez la Madonna mostrando el truco, la verga travesti que campaneaba como un péndulo llamando a todo el museo, haciendo que corrieran las secretarias y auxiliares hasta la sala, provocando tanto despelote, tanto grito de los profesores y del jefe scout tocando el pito, vociferando que cortaran esa suciedad, que eso no era arte, eso era pornografía, pura mugre libertina que desprestigiaba a la democracia. (Ibid: 42-3)

The mere presence of the out-of-place phallus in the original performance by the ‘Madonna Mapuche’ is in the first place clearly intended to carry a political significance. The erotic body which is exposed so explicitly within the urban environment functions to obstruct the usual flows of representative imagery that construct the body politic, and as such, it provokes outrage amongst the figures of the establishment (the secretaries, teachers, and scout leaders). Yet, in contrast to the rather more straightforward relationship between art performance (*acción*) and text (manifesto) exhibited by CADA and discussed in the previous chapter of this work, Lemebel’s textual description of the performance itself adds a further layer of political complexity to the event. Lemebel’s treatment of the obtrusive, out-of-place, transgender body is typically irreverent and humorous. The taboo corporality – the body with AIDS, the desiring homosexual body, or the transgender body – that Lemebel insistently places at the centre of his literary work, blocks the production of urban space as a site for the economic and political projects of the new democracy in Chile. This putative democracy requires a consensus politics based on the neoliberal ideal whereby the reality of material reproduction is obscured. In opposition to this consensual reality, in Lemebel’s texts, the body as pathologised marker of sexual and social difference intrudes monstrously onto the body politic, and forces a reconfiguration of spectacular representation. The desiring body can no longer be a blank sheet as in the ‘Barbarella clip’ cited above, but rather demands recognition as belonging to the sensible sphere, and as claiming a part within that domain. In Lemebel’s writings, the abject refuses to remain in a position of abjection, and the author replaces the neoliberal conversion of desire into the spectacle with an insistent visibility of – and encounter with – the erotic body of the other.



### *Relational Becomings*

While for Lemebel, the homoerotic nature of the encounter between subjects retains a significant political symbolism, even after the AIDS crisis and the Chilean transition to democracy, in Perlongher's case, homosexuality becomes explicitly less central to his work at this time. In the famous essay 'La desaparición de la homosexualidad' (originally published in 1991), the author argues that AIDS and the subsequent medicalisation of sexuality have functioned to remove the political oppositionality of an emphasis on sexuality and desire:

Archipiélagos de lentejuelas, tocados de plumas iridiscentes (en cada vertebración de la cadera trepidante, las galas de cien flamencos que flotan en el aire tornado un polvo rosa), constelaciones de purpurinas haciendo del rostro una máscara más, toda una mampostería kitsch, de una impostada delicadeza, de una estridencia artificiosa, se derrumba bajo el impacto (digámoslo) de la muerte. La homosexualidad (al menos la homosexualidad masculina, que de ella se trata) desaparece del escenario que tan rebuscadamente había montado, hace mutis por el foro, se borra como la esfumación de un pincelito en torno de la pestaña acalambrada, acaramelada. (1997a: 85)

In this essay, Perlongher cites Bataille,<sup>43</sup> who argued for three ways of dissolving the individual monad and thus achieving ecstasy: 'la orgía, el amor, lo sagrado' (Ibid: 87). Here Perlongher, having previously privileged the former two in his writing, now shifts to an emphasis on the latter as a new locus for the 'homo-encounter', to use Bersani's term. Rather than locating that encounter in the sexual, the author now establishes it in the total dissolution of subjectivity towards which his earlier emphasis on the becoming-woman gestured: 'sólo en la disolución del cuerpo en lo cósmico (o sea, en lo sagrado) es que se da el éxtasis total, la salida de sí definitiva' (Ibid). Perlongher is careful to emphasise that he does not consider homosexuality to be problematic in itself, but rather that according to his terms, the liberation

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<sup>43</sup> The reference is to Bataille's *Death and Sensuality: Eroticism and the Taboo*, in which the author identifies and explores three forms of eroticism: physical, emotional, and religious (1962: 15). Bataille insists that all eroticism is concerned with substituting 'for the individual isolated discontinuity a feeling of profound continuity' (Ibid). In other words, eroticism aims to dissolve the boundaries between subjects in favour of 'a primal continuity linking us with everything that is' (Ibid). Physical eroticism, while permitting a temporary dissolution of corporeal separateness, ends in holding on to 'the separateness of the individual in a rather selfish and cynical fashion' (Ibid: 17). Emotional eroticism which can either be derived from or detached from physical eroticism is not constrained in the same way, but the communion it offers is linked to death. 'Possession of the beloved object does not imply death, but the idea of death is linked with the urge to possess. If the lover cannot possess the beloved he will sometimes think of killing her; often he would rather kill her than lose her. Or else he may wish to die himself' (Ibid: 20). Religious eroticism (or divine love, or mysticism) more successfully reflects the continuity of the subject since the beloved object (the divine) is itself fundamentally possessed of continuity of existence.

movement has succeeded, and as such homosexuality is no longer perverse in a way that can productively complicate the political sphere. AIDS provides the *coup de grace* to the subversive political value of homosexual sex, ‘porque cambia completamente las líneas de alianza, las divisorias de aguas, las fronteras’ (Ibid: 89). In other words, post 1991, homosexuality is no longer a point of dissensus in Perlongher’s vision, being replaced by the mystic religions that occupy him in his later writings. In addition to a shift in focus away from the desiring homosexual body, Perlongher claims to relinquish the physical and the material that were previously so important to his aesthetic. In the same essay, he associates the body with subjectivity and personhood, suggesting that it is only in the mystical encounter beyond the corporeal that the truly relational moment can occur: ‘Abandonamos el cuerpo personal. Se trata ahora de salir de sí’ (Ibid: 90).

Yet it is not entirely true that Perlongher abandons the body, nor his emphasis on disidentitarian gender and sexuality. It is clear that the earlier emphasis on transvestism is much diminished in the later poetry. In part this shift was owing to the devastation of the AIDS epidemic, and in part to the political opening of the post-dictatorship, which included the possibility for increased gay rights activism, such that the author understood the immediately dissensual nature of non-normative gender performances to be diminished. According to Ben Bollig, Perlongher’s need to search for another provocation was, therefore, sparked by the fact that a new being-woman was replacing the endlessly protean becoming-woman:

With the spread of transvestite figures in the mass media and the development of surgical techniques for gender reassignment, it became more and more possible in the 1980s for the becoming-woman of the *travesti* to turn instead into being a woman. (2008: 148-9)

The binary, therefore, was no longer overturned by rewritings of gender; rather it was being reinforced by the increased ease with which a subject could cross from one side to the other. As a result of these factors, in Perlongher’s final two poetry collections, *Aguas aéreas* (1990) and *El chorreo de las iluminaciones* (1992), the author moves from a focus on sex and desire to a focus on mystic religions – both classical and contemporary. However, Bollig suggests that it is still possible to trace a fascination with the figure of the *travesti*, and with the becoming-woman that so strongly marked the poet’s earlier work. While thematically there is no longer any mention of the transvestite character, these later works, Bollig argues, demonstrate ‘a return to the gender-crossing aesthetics of the earlier poems and an attempt to

create a poetics of the in-between' (Ibid: 126). In other words, while gender and sexuality are no longer the straightest pathways to the out-of-place or in-between, Perlongher's aesthetic choices in his later work continue to privilege that place without a place, or the part without a part. Or, in Bollig's terms, although 'strictly speaking the *travesti* is thematically absent', the transvestite figure still 'informs Perlongher's poetics and aesthetics' (Ibid: 127). Following Bollig's argument, I contend that while the body – like the figure of the *travesti* – cedes its central place within Perlongher's poetry, the spirit of its earlier political application has not been abandoned. In his final two collections, Perlongher does clearly shift his emphasis away from the intensive materiality of the earlier poetry, instead focusing upon the spiritual and ephemeral. However, far from altering the political direction of the poetry, I maintain that these later encounters with mysticism function to continue the initial movement towards a deconstruction of both spiritual and physical boundaries. As such, the continued exposition of the self to the other as a moment of relational equality remains central to Perlongher's work throughout. The mystical eroticism of the later poetry continues the work of becoming which, as Perlongher makes clear as early as his 1981 essay 'Los devenires minoritarios', does not relate only to the self, but is a profoundly relational project: 'Devenir no es transformarse en otro, sino entrar en alianza (aberrante), en contagio, en inmición con el (lo) diferente. El devenir no va de un punto a otro, sino que entra en el "entre" del medio, es ese "entre"' (1997a: 68).

Even death itself is figured in these later poems as a gateway to relational becomings. While Perlongher never explicitly references AIDS (from which he died in 1992) in his poetry, he does refer to his own death, in the refrain 'Ahora que me estoy muriendo' (in the poem 'Canción de la muerte en bicicleta', 1997b: 356-9), and implicitly to AIDS in 'El mal de sí', which, in line with Perlongher's frequent use of partial or coded vocabulary, the reader is certainly conditioned to read as 'El mal de SIDA' (Ibid: 355). However, as Jill Kuhnheim points out, the 'sí' in this title additionally suggests a spiritual level to the ailment: it is also 'el mal de sí mismo, del sujeto por sí mismo – un estado espiritual o psicológico que corresponde a la enajenación al principio del siglo veinte' (2003: 124). In this poem, death is anthropomorphised, directly addressed by the poetic subject, and figured as contagious, decomposing, absenting, leprous:

Detente, muerte:  
           tu infernal chorreando  
 escampar hace las estanterías  
 la purulenta salvia los baldíos

de cremoso torpor tiñe y derrite,  
ausentando los cuerpos en los campos:  
los cuerpos carcomidos en los campos barridos por la lepra.

Ya no se puede disertar. (1997b: 355)

The body is, as can be seen, very much still a part of Perlongher's later poetry: no longer a desiring body, but still one whose materiality cannot be denied. This placing of the 'cuerpo carcomido' into the poetic sphere functions to negate the abjection of the suffering body, and returns it to a part within the public sphere. Indeed, I contend that the intense corporality of the suffering body here alters the terms of inclusion of the sensible. Perlongher concludes this poem with the line 'Ya no se puede disertar'. This might be read as indicating a loss of language – that faced with so much invasive decaying physicality, language and speech collapse, or at least must reassess their expressive power. And yet, the specific use of the word 'disertar' here should also give the reader pause, indicating not so much a negation of the possibility of language production – which might as easily have been expressed by the more usual 'hablar' – but rather a questioning of speech as an act that produces inequality. 'Disertar' suggests lecturing, discursive pedagogy, an inequality of access to speech. The physical presence of the body with AIDS undermines the hierarchical positioning of subjects, whereby one can lecture to another. The insistent alliterative repetition of 'cuerpos', 'carcomidos', and 'campos' forcibly interjects the body into the aesthetic realm of speech production, blocking its uncontested flows. And its presence has the effect of definitively shifting the parameters for communication within that sensible sphere. It undermines the exclusion of voices, and acts as a claim to the public sphere on behalf of all corporeal subjects.

Death, therefore, has both a positive and a negative connotation for Perlongher here. At first, death is envisaged in terms of absence, but then absence itself acquires a positive value, precisely as that which exceeds, overflows, and erupts into existing discourse:

Ve, muerte, a ti.  
Encónchate sin disparar el estallido de la cápsula.  
Escondida que no seas descubierta.  
Pues una vez presente todo lo vuelves ausencia.  
Ausencia gris, ausencia chata, ausencia dolorosa del que falta.

No es lo que falta, es lo que sobra, lo que no duele.  
Aquello que excede la austeridad taimada de las cosas  
o que desborda desdoblado la mezquindad del alma prisionera.  
Mientras estamos dentro de nosotros duele el alma,

duele ese estarse sin palabras suspendido en la higuera  
como un noctámbulo extraviado. (1997b: 355)

Death is excessive here both in material and spiritual terms. The ‘austeridad taimada de las cosas’ is exceeded by death, but so too is ‘la mezquindad del alma prisionera’. Death is the final agent of disruption of our sensible sphere. All hierarchies, all inclusions and exclusions, are undone by its insuperable absence-as-presence. It cannot be tamed by aesthetic symbols, by language, or by any of our human tools for understanding and representing the world. And yet death does not bring an end to the communication between beings that has been the most central subject of all of Perlongher’s work. The final three lines here provide the key to understanding Perlongher’s poetic response to AIDS and his refusal to relinquish the centrality of the body, even where that body is dying, dead, and decomposing. The poet writes that: ‘Mientras estamos dentro de nosotros duele el alma’. Not only does this poem function to return the suffering body to full visibility within the public sphere, thereby contesting the mediatic and representational consensus that requires that the AIDS body be made abject, but it also points towards the endless relationality with otherness that is the goal of all of Perlongher’s work. The speaking subject can only be heard and perceived within the sensible domain, can only move away from being and silence (‘ese estarse sin palabras’) and towards becoming and voice, through the relational contact that is not diminished by death.

### ***Conclusion: Togetherness, Apart***

What I have sought to argue in this chapter is that Lemebel and Perlongher configure identity and difference in often highly contrasting ways, and develop out of these configurations contrasting political aesthetics. Lemebel at times retains gendered and sexual identity and difference as a strategic political category, while, at least by the end of his work, Perlongher aims to displace individual identity as a discrete category altogether. Nevertheless, the subjects that people the work of both writers retain a common disidentificatory drive. They represent sexual or gendered disidentification, or they gesture toward the disidentificatory performance of the out-of-place body. They reject the ordering role of the state or of society, and as such they queer the post-dictatorial democracy that putatively distributes equality while at the same time reinforcing the hierarchical stratifications that reject the claim to equality made by the part who has no part. However,

these subjects are also profoundly relational. Neither author has an interest in solipsistic engagements with difference (gendered, sexual, or other) as a means to an individualistic valorisation of a self unrelated to any existing distributions of the social or political. Rather, the queer, disidentificatory nature of their subjects is always the precursor to the search for an encounter with otherness – the ‘homo-encounter’ in Bersani’s terms. I have argued that the encounter with the other, unfettered by the limitations of identity politics, is the final goal of both writers, because such an encounter disrupts – queers – the old ways of relating to the community and to the world. Relationality in these works, in other words, is the exposition of the dispute with the police distribution of the sensible. My work here contends that both Lemebel and Perlongher foreground embodied experience as being integral to the explosion of police consensus that both writers seek. The AIDS crisis affected the way in which that embodied experience could be expressed, but it did not diminish its importance in either case.

The disidentificatory subjects of Lemebel’s and Perlongher’s texts tread a fine line between a resistance to the assignation of place and identity, and a refusal to allow the imposition of an arguably equally dangerous permanent placelessness. Similarly, the authors maintain a delicate balance between embracing movement and fluidity, while at the same time rejecting the (fetishisation of the) flows of global capitalism. Relationality is the key in both cases to this balancing act as it relates to the political aesthetic of these writers. The relational permits an identification with otherness that does not founder in nonidentity but rather opens up borders and dissolves the identificatory stasis of the self. Furthermore, while a certain fluidity of boundaries is maintained, the relational linking of two or more bodies out-of-place operates as a means to block or interrupt the flows of globalised capitalism. The relationality of a collection of out-of-place bodies, bodies that are not part of the state or of society, represents the democratic displacement of identities that ultimately form the basis for a new kind of community.

### **III.**

#### **Community Beyond Consensus:**

#### **Political Poetry in the Aftermath of Dictatorship**

*Lastly, there is democracy if there is a dispute conducted by a nonidentary subject on the stage where the people emerge.*

Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement*

### ***Introduction: The Political Labour of Poetry***

In the first two chapters of this work, I analysed aesthetic articulations of resistance to the prescribed wholeness of the consensus government after dictatorship in Argentina and Chile. The articulation of these resistances was, I showed, coupled with a sometimes contradictory desire to re-build the post-dictatorial (comm)unity on a different configuration of body and *polis*. I argued in the first chapter that the theorised commitment to fragmentation in *avanzada* artworks produced under dictatorship in Chile was in reality often superseded by a desire to create a new biopolitics founded in wholeness. Such a desire to restore wholeness to the body politic was part of a drive to break free of the biopolitical control exerted by the dictatorship and to assert instead a newly expressed subjectivity based on the assertion of the equality of corporeal beings. The second chapter engaged with the subversively desiring, and disidentitarian body as it finds itself ‘out-of-place’ in the post-dictatorial city. The political impetus of such a body arises from its anarchic nomadism through the urban environment and its relational encounters with similarly anarchic bodies. In this next and final chapter, I examine what becomes of the simultaneous desire for the continued relationality between bodies and for the restoration of wholeness to the body politic, when faced with the amnesiac consensus politics of the post-dictatorship periods in both Argentina and Chile.

As discussed in the introduction to this work, the officially led transitions to democracy in both nations were largely designed to restore a concept of national wholeness at the expense of the recalling of recent traumatic memory. So how does the political aesthetic respond to this suppression of trauma? This chapter considers a series of works by the Chilean poet Raúl Zurita (one of the members of CADA) alongside the work of the Argentine poet Juan Gelman. Both poets are committed to a poetic expression of traumatic memory, and to experiments in form aimed at foregrounding the fragmentation, division, and rupture underlying post-dictatorial democratic consensus. In both cases, the continued appeal to trauma stands as a clear (melancholic) challenge to the continuity-based politics that characterised both nations in the post-dictatorship period. However, the political story of the



poetry does not end there. Just as in CADA's attempts at creating a collective subjectivity founded in the body, or as in Perlongher and Lemebe's focus on the relationship between anarchic, out-of-place bodies, I argue that both Zurita and Gelman similarly continue to work towards a conception of community that stems from an aesthetic centralising of the body. However, as I go on to show, this remains a community that resists the consensus-driven politics of the neoliberal post-dictatorship period, and that remains true to the fragmentation that so drastically dismembered and disembowelled the body politic under dictatorship.

For many, the demands placed on poetry by dictatorship, including the burdens of censorship, the dismantling of forms of available expression, and the specific representational challenge of torture, meant that the dream of poetic writing as political project was compromised. In Argentina, as Thorpe Running argues, the politically engaged poetry written in the years before the onset of the *Proceso* by authors such as Gelman, Alberto Szpunberg, Roberto Santoro, and Paco Urondo, was cut short when these, and others, were killed, disappeared, or forced into exile. Running observes thereafter 'a clear tendency towards an "allusive" poetry, especially one that expresses a distrust of the communicative power of language' (1990: 40) and a generalised shift, even in poetry with an overt political subject matter, towards individual introspection. In Chile, a similar tendency occurs, with the dictatorship preventing the publication of any politically oppositional poetry, and writers (including Zurita himself) being arrested, disappeared, murdered, or forced into exile. For both Gelman and Zurita, therefore, the challenge of writing political poetry in the post-dictatorship period begins with a consideration of how to respond to this previous widespread destruction of the association of the poetic and the political.

Yet even before the dictatorships, poetry itself as a politico-aesthetic production contained unique challenges, given that, in the Western tradition, it has been traditionally understood as the 'purest' of the literary art forms, most clearly removed from social and political reality, and founded wholly in the category of the aesthetic. William Rowe suggests that since the middle of the twentieth century, Latin American poets have had 'two main inheritances to be used, modified, or abandoned: the work of the avant-gardes and the tradition of political poetry' (2000: i). In Rowe's terms, limited models of critical reading therefore also arise, founded in this division of the political and the aesthetic. This dualism imagines an abandonment of the 'aesthetic' (by which is intended linguistic and imagistic complexity) as necessary for a politically effective poetry, since textual difficulty is often figured as anti-egalitarian or anti-democratic, being exclusionary in its deliberate opacity. In the first chapter I discussed Nelly Richard's defence of aesthetic difficulty in *The*

*Insubordination of Signs*, in which she argues that textual inscrutability is necessary if the aesthetic is to resist assimilation into dominant power networks. Rather than perpetuating hierarchies, in Richard's terms, the inscrutable artwork, characterised by its semiotic density, dismantles them because of its liminality. As ever, Richard's argument here is compelling, particularly given a critical desire to continue to value the production of challenging artworks when faced with the economic and cultural dominance of commercialised mass culture. We must enquire, however, as to the extent to which strict adherence to this thesis in fact re-emphasises class divisions, and as to whether it might be more helpful ultimately to think beyond the putative dichotomy of a critically uncomplicated mass culture versus elite art forms that would remain equally obtuse. According to Jacques Rancière's central concept of equality, in order to avoid lapsing into philosophical or sociological condescension, democracy cannot be thought without the presumption of the equality of all thinking subjects. In these terms, it is not only condescending to assume that aesthetic complexity is anti-democratic, but it is also a logical fallacy, since to argue that difficulty necessarily leads to exclusion is to begin from a position that assumes, *a priori*, the inequality of intellectual capacity as an immutable given.

Such a critical consideration of poetry, operating from an assumption of inequality, can perhaps best be elucidated through a brief analysis of the work of the ever-influential Pablo Neruda. It is important to stress that this work aims to avoid a reductive establishment of Neruda as the figurehead of the politico-aesthetic vanguard, encapsulating its problematic founding in an unequal division of manual and intellectual labour. It is all too easy to point to the archetypal voicing of otherness in *Alturas de Macchu Picchu* and thereby condemn a rich and complex poetic oeuvre that traverses multiple stages, each with different political aims and aesthetic effects. Neruda's influence on twentieth-century Latin American poetry indeed cannot be overstated, with each of his new styles provoking an effect of poetic defamiliarisation through its respective originality. Neruda's poetic trajectory involves an increasing investment in surrealist language and tropes as he moves from his early love poetry (in the *Veinte poemas de amor*) to the *Residencia* cycle, characterised by ontological crisis culminating in self-alienation and linguistic disjunction in the first two *Residencias*. The political crisis of the Spanish civil war prompts a shift to a more clearly-expressed politically-committed poetry in the *Tercera Residencia*, with the poet asserting his affiliation with the Republican cause, as well as strengthening links with the Soviet Union.<sup>44</sup> The *Canto*

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<sup>44</sup> Famously Neruda sets out his new valorisation of the political over the aesthetic in the poem 'Explico algunas

*General* represents a return to the epic tradition that Neruda combines with a continued expression of social commitment specifically focused on Latin America.<sup>45</sup> The poet's commitment to colloquial expression is continued in the later *Odas elementales* in which Neruda focuses once more on the material and the everyday. Rather than the debased physicality that characterised the emphasis on materiality in the *Residencias*, however, Neruda here undertakes a project whereby the humble 'becomes ordinary and magical, not because it is a product of nature but because man, through daily use, gives it stature and nobility' (Agosín, 1986: 98). In other words, Neruda attempts a defetishisation of the material world, expressing it as the product of (possibly alienated) labour. This is expressive of the resolution Neruda seeks throughout his later poetry, which he attributes not to aesthetic revolution, but to a continued political and social commitment. In other words, Neruda maintains the dualism between politics and aesthetics that Rowe describes in his work as being a characteristic of twentieth-century poetic production.

In Neruda's case, this division between the political and the aesthetic corresponds to, and even strengthens, the maintenance of a division between intellectual and manual labour. This extract from the *Canto general* demonstrates the counterpoint between the artist and the worker that Neruda so strikingly upholds throughout his work:

Escribo para el pueblo aunque no pueda  
 leer mi poesía con sus ojos rurales.  
 Vendrá el instante en que una línea, el aire  
 que removió mi vida llegará a sus orejas,  
 y entonces el labriego levantará los ojos,  
 el minero sonreirá rompiendo piedras,  
 el palanquero se limpiará la frente,  
 el pescador verá mejor el brillo  
 de un pez que palpitando le quemará las manos,  
 el mecánico, limpio, recién lavado, lleno  
 de aroma de jabón mirará mis poemas,  
 y ellos dirán tal vez: 'Fue un camarada'.

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cosas'. In a complete aesthetic reversal, Neruda here attempts to speak to his readers in a different way: rather than asking the reader to reflect on and engage with the poetry intellectually to extract meaning from ambiguity, he now enters into a direct dialogue, summing up and discarding his previous poetic output: 'Preguntaréis: Y dónde están las lilas?/Y la metafísica cubierta de amapolas?/Y la lluvia que a menudo golpea/sus palabras llenándolas/de agujeros y pájaros?'. Neruda ends this poem by providing the only explanation he feels is necessary: aesthetic frivolity has become not only impossible but also morally reprehensible faced with the genuine political suffering he has witnessed in Spain: 'Venid a ver la sangre por las calles,/venid a ver/la sangre por las calles,/venid a ver la sangre/por las calles!' (1951: 49-51).

<sup>45</sup> Most famously, the *Canto* contains the long poem *Alturas de Macchu Picchu*. The culmination of this poetic cycle, number XII, is a triumphant call to rebirth or revolution of the American people, whose salvation is shown to lie in Neruda's voice. Neruda takes on a Christ-like role as saviour of his people to be invited by him to 'Acudid a mis venas y a mi boca./Hablad por mis palabras y mi sangre' (1955: 36).

Eso es bastante, ésa es la corona que quiero. (1955: 364)

While the poet undoubtedly places himself in a position of solidarity with the numerous workers who people this text, there is a notable distinction maintained here between his labour and theirs. Following his formative political experience in Madrid during the Spanish civil war, Neruda became a great admirer of the Soviet Union, and joined the Communist Party of Chile in 1945. This attitude that divides the labourer and the intellectual represents a typical Party response to domination in which the working classes are seen as ‘victims of ideological obfuscation’, requiring leadership by Party intellectuals in order to ‘realize what their situation is and what kind of political action will liberate them from oppression’ (Deranty, 2010: 4).

A similar continued adherence to a basic conception of inequality was the cause of the well-documented split between Louis Althusser and Jacques Rancière in the post-‘68 environment of France. As Jean-Philippe Deranty explains, according to Rancière, the separation of the worker and the intellectual serves only to reinforce structures of domination, since ‘the social hierarchy, established through the division of labour (notably the division between manual and intellectual professions) is translated into a symbolic hierarchy, that amounts to making the working classes passive masses whose words and acts are meaningless’ (2010: 4). In his archival work, Rancière attempted to shift academic discourse away from solipsistic philosophising and towards the recuperation of instances in which the speech of the other disrupts extant aestheticisations of politics. His early archival work demonstrates the diversity of voices and visions that make up the working class of nineteenth-century France. Indeed, as Rancière discovered, those voices were characterised not by any class essence but by their blurring of the boundaries of class, and especially of the divisions between manual labour and intellectual work.

In a subsequent shift to the theoretical, in *The Philosopher and His Poor* (2003), Rancière analyses the work of three major leftist thinkers, Marx, Sartre, and Bourdieu. In this work, he argued that all three thinkers re-inscribed the divisions that they claimed to be critiquing, by denying the poor any vocal agency. In so doing, they used the poor as objects of knowledge in order to reproduce the elite academic position of the philosopher- or sociologist-king. Rancière begins his text with an analysis of Plato’s Republic, which text provides, he suggests, the foundation for Marxist scientism. This in turn becomes the basis from which more contemporary leftist thinkers such as Sartre and Bourdieu conceive their relationship with the working classes, or in Rancière’s term, the ‘poor’. Plato’s Republic,

according to Rancière, operates according to a fundamental principle: that ‘a person can only do one thing at a time’ (2003: 4). Plato argues this from the point of view of productive efficacy, such that the unshakeable division of labour he posits is related to questions of time and leisure. Thus, as Rancière writes, Plato’s Republic ‘knows only one evil, but this is the absolute evil: that two things be in one, two functions in the same place, two qualities in one and the same being’ (Ibid: 8). This same division is reproduced in Marx’s, Sartre’s, and Bourdieu’s works, according to Rancière. With Plato, these three thinkers have ‘in common the construction of a group Rancière calls “the poor” (the proletariat, the workers or the dominated), who are held to be constitutively incapable of thought’ (Davis, 2010: 20).

Marx, as Oliver Davis points out in his reading of Rancière’s text, ‘alternately disparaged and idealized the workers of his day’, and was ‘guilty of a condescending view of even the most overtly politicized members of the working class as intellectually incapable and even subhuman’ (Ibid: 16). As Rancière argues, Marx’s proletariat is ‘someone who has only one thing to do – to make the revolution – and who cannot do that because of what he is’ (2003: 80). He is granted existence as a subject only through the philosopher who identifies his task and guides him in it. Similarly, Sartre continues this return to Platonic divisions of labour, arguing that the poor’s lack of ability to speak stems from the fact that ‘They do not have time. They are too tired’ (Ibid: 137). Sartre then reiterates Plato’s argument for specialisation based on the availability of time and leisure, and divides labour, essentially proscribing the performance of more than one activity by each individual. Indeed, Rancière argues that Sartre’s philosophy implies that in the ‘age of mass production it is less possible than ever for a person to do two things at once. There is no longer any commandment, only a sufficient reason’ (Ibid: 138). The poor therefore require representation by the Party and its intellectuals, since their fatigue prevents them from right thinking.

Most striking, for Rancière, is Bourdieu’s own claims to reverse Platonic divisions, which he ends in reproducing in his adherence to a Marxian understanding of ideology. The sociologist, in Bourdieu’s vision, contributes to the conversation about social class in a way the philosopher cannot, because he alone is able to perceive the dissimulation that occludes the social structures of domination maintaining the hierarchies dividing labours. He nevertheless ensures his own indispensability since his object of study (the poor) always lacks the capacity to teach itself about this dissimulation. Mimicking Bourdieu’s mode of approaching this imbalance, Rancière writes that:

If the social machine captures us, it is because we do not know how it captures us. And

if we do not know how it captures us even though it is right before our eyes, it is because we do not want to know. All recognition is a misrecognition, all unveiling a veiling. (2003: 170)

Pedagogically, in other words, the sociologist reproduces the alienation of the poor by assigning knowledge of alienation itself to the sociologist alone, and with that, the unique privilege of being able to ‘reveal’ or ‘unveil’ the hierarchies that create oppression. Rancière thus critiques Bourdieu for the fundamentally pessimistic position he assumes with regards to the absolute divisions between classes (and labours): ‘For the lowly ranked, sociology can do no more than explain why philosophers misrecognize the true reasons keeping them in their places. A somewhat depressing conclusion’ (Ibid: 180). Rancière’s oeuvre, on the other hand, as Oliver Davis discusses, articulates the demand ‘for a recognition of the equal capacity of all for sophisticated complexity of self-understanding and self-performance which exceeds the conservative insistence that the worker must do one thing and one thing only’ (2010: 22).

For Rancière, the political is related to the way in which our sensible reality is constructed, with the divisions relating to the public and the private, to who can speak and be heard, to who can see and be seen, all available for redistribution along different lines. If the political is thus in the sphere of sensible perception, it is clearly an aesthetic proposition. As Rancière later argues in *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009), aesthetics itself (in the aesthetic regime) is also where the promise of egalitarian political possibility can be located. As Davis notes, this political promise of aesthetics relies upon ‘what Rancière calls a “cut” or “break” (*coupure*) that severs the intentions of the artist from the response of the spectator; it is this cut that allows for the autonomy of the spectator’ (2010: 154). Contrary, therefore, to the philosophical pedagogy espoused by the thinkers analysed in *The Philosopher and His Poor*, a radicalised political aesthetic – and with this, a radical aesthetic ordering of the political – relies upon the assumption of the equality of all subjects to make their own analyses and interpretations. Indeed, as Davis underscores, it is ‘for Rancière at his most radically faithful to Jacotot’s vision of the society of the emancipated as the society of artists, that the division between artist and spectator is, in the final analysis, positional or conventional’ (Ibid: 155).<sup>46</sup> In Neruda’s vision, the political goal of the artwork would be realised when the worker recognised the artist as a comrade, or fellow labourer. Yet according to Rancière’s analysis, this recognition for the artist is made redundant at the point at which the division between the

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<sup>46</sup> Rancière’s engagement with the pedagogical theories of Jacotot is located in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (1991).

aesthetic and political spheres is shown to be customary but not necessary. As such, once this radical recognition of the equivalence of spheres has been realised, the aesthetic and the political are equally able to be claimed by any and all equal subjects.

In returning to Neruda and his division of poetic and manual labour, it becomes clear that the poet tends to privilege a top-down ‘solidarity’ over a political project based on an assumed equality. However, the poem discussed above arguably gestures towards an equality that is yet to be realised, and that is founded in the reconfiguration of poetry as labour, and the poet as fellow labourer-creator; in other words, in the elimination of the division between intellectual and manual labour. The tentative solution that this poem posits is a return to the origins of poetry as *poiesis*: the labour of creation. This poem points to a (future) shift from a poetic process of *mimesis* whereby the political act of the poetry arises in making visible inequality or oppression (as in the *Alturas de Macchu Picchu*), towards a process whereby the labours of poetry and politics become one and the same. The uncertainty of Neruda’s project that is expressed here in the ‘tal vez’, and the lack of resolution formed by the juxtaposition of the future and past tenses in the penultimate line, accentuates the aporia that the poet believes divides poetry and politics, as outlined in his prologue to ‘Las furias y las penas’, in the *Tercera Residencia*: ‘Ay! Si con sólo una gota de poesía o de amor pudiéramos aplacar la ira del mundo, pero eso sólo lo pueden la lucha y el corazón resuelto’ (1951: 27). This continued belief in division means that Neruda is unable fully to achieve the projection of poetry conceptualised as labour: his poetry remains fixated in the voicing of otherness and in an insistent avant-garde division of labourer and intellectual. However, it is important to recognise in his poetry both the desire for a subversion of the hierarchy of inequality, and the imagining of a future not restricted by the concomitant division of labour.

This chapter investigates what has become of Neruda’s tentative (and incomplete) project of creating equality through an elimination of the division between manual and intellectual/artistic labour. It does so specifically in relation to the post-dictatorship period in both Argentina and Chile, and at a point where the question of the political labour of poetry – that is, of poetry *as* political labour – resurfaces. I argue that both Raúl Zurita and Juan Gelman work to overcome the aforementioned division through the creation of new communities founded in universal finitude and the absolute relationality of being (these terms will be explained in detail below), and thus in a deeply philosophical equality. The focus on equality as the basis for community permits a unique approach to the work of these poets. Cultural criticism that examines political poetry in terms of resistance, subversion, or social critique is not only vague in terms of positing a generalised righting of wrongs with no vision

of how this might be achieved, but it also fails to undermine hierarchy and division. This is because the championing of marginality or subordination continues to assert value based upon positionality. The hierarchy may be reversed but it remains in place. As such, the conception of resistance by or for marginalised subjectivities does not and cannot achieve more than a reassertion of division and distinction. In other words, a politics of resistance founded in marginalised difference cannot be coexistent with the presupposition of equality, and will not, therefore, disrupt the partition of sensible reality in a meaningful way. Equality presents an alternative to this theoretical impasse.

### *Community and Equality*

Like so many of their generation, both Raúl Zurita and Juan Gelman suffered personal loss and trauma during the military dictatorships of the 1970s and 80s in Chile and Argentina respectively. At the moment of Pinochet's coup against Salvador Allende (1973), Zurita, then just 22 years old, was arrested and detained, along with hundreds of other oppositional Chileans, in the hold of a ship. Imprisoned for six weeks in the total darkness of the hold and brutally and repeatedly beaten, the trauma of this event never left him, providing a vital impetus for much of his future poetry, as well as for his later actions of self-mutilation. The endless sense of loss that permeates his poetry stems both from this personal trauma and from the trauma suffered by the entire nation during dictatorship. As a result, the personal and the national are intricately interwoven throughout Zurita's work, with both envisaged as being irrevocably fragmented and damaged. In *Anteparaiso*, for example, the section entitled 'Pastoral de Chile', begins with a darkly travestied version of this lyrical form in which:

Chile está cubierto de sombras  
 los valles están quemadas, ha crecido la zarza  
 y en lugar de diarios y revistas  
 sólo se ven franjas negras en las esquinas  
 Todos se han marchado  
 o están dormidos, incluso tú misma  
 que hasta ayer estabas despierta  
 hoy estás durmiendo, de Duelo Universal (1982: 103)

This poem evokes both the destruction of bodies and the destruction of intellectual culture and its political potential: the 'diarios y revistas' have disappeared, to be replaced by the nothingness of the 'franjas negras'. Language suffers an erasure, and the other's voice is



silenced, yet Zurita aims to counter this silencing with his interpellation of the female other ('tú misma') as the sleeping self waiting to come into being. The landscape of the nation has been reduced to ruin and the relationality of beings within the nation has been similarly destroyed as a result of the mass exile – 'Todos se han marchado' – and of the 'sleep' into which the remaining subjects have been plunged. This foundation of fragmentation and ruin, as will be seen, underlies all of Zurita's work.

Meanwhile, Gelman, who was out of the country campaigning on behalf of the *Montoneros* group at the time of the Argentine military coup of 1976, suffered the loss of his son, daughter-in-law, and unborn grandchild, all disappeared by the military regime. His son Marcelo Ariel was executed, his body placed in an oil drum filled with cement, and dumped in a river in Buenos Aires. It was not until 1990 that the remains were finally identified. The remains of Claudia, Marcelo Ariel's wife, have never been found, but Gelman was finally able to contact his granddaughter, who was adopted at birth by a pro-military family in Uruguay. This triple loss is the primary trauma to which Gelman endlessly returns in his poetry, as in this poem – number XVII from the *Carta abierta* (1980) collection (published in *Interrupciones I*):

no quiero otra noticia sino vos/  
cualquiera otra es migajita donde  
se muere de hambre la memoria/cava  
para seguir buscándote/se vuelve

loca de oscuridad/fuega su perra/  
arde a pedazos/mira tu mirar  
ausente/espejo donde no me veo/  
azogás esta sombra/crepitás/

sudo de frío cuando creo oírte/  
helado de amor yago en la mitad  
mía de vos/no acabo de acabar/  
es claramente entiendo que no entiendo. (1997: 148)

Here the poetic labour is founded in a dismantling of selfhood as a result of the trauma of eternally unresolved loss. The poet is both corporeally destroyed – dying of hunger, burning and freezing – and mentally and emotionally undone. The mirror offers no reflection of the self, and the possibility for a cognitive processing of loss is foreclosed, with the poem foundering in melancholic confusion and grammatical disruption by the end. This fragmentation of selfhood, along with the fragmentation of the nation in Zurita's poem above,

is characteristic of a broader commitment to fragmentation in the work of both poets, a highly significant aesthetic decision in terms of the politics their poetry aims to impart.

Although both Gelman and Zurita are poets who, despite writing intensely experimental and even oppositional poetry, have, to a certain degree been recuperated by both state and market,<sup>47</sup> they retain their commitment to fragmentation. The poets' resistance to official processes of memorialisation is also a resistance to the idea of a future wholeness and to the cathartic working through of past trauma upon which the voice of consensus politics in both Chile and Argentina insists. According to William Rowe, Zurita's particular response to the memorialisation of trauma functions as an expression of the psychoanalytic conception of a working through and hence cathartic expunging of pain as a prerequisite for the future emotional growth of the nation. He suggests that for Zurita, 'the pain of recent Chilean experience is something that needs to be purged, if any regeneration is to occur' (2000: 281). While I do agree with Rowe that Zurita's poetry is aimed at the ultimate re-growth of the Chilean nation, I point furthermore to a determined maintenance of fragmentation in his work, as well as in the work of Gelman, which in both cases resists any possibility of cathartic closure. Other critics have noted this poetic rejection of a consensual political present, and have read it in terms of a melancholic resistance to the connections between dictatorship and transitional democracy.

The reference to melancholia refers originally back to Freud. According to Freud, although the work of mourning is painful and difficult to explain in libidinal-economic terms, the process by which the ego detaches itself from the beloved object, permitting the liberated libido to substitute one cathetic object for another, is a healthy process requiring only time as treatment. Melancholia, in contrast, is a pathological response to loss in which the subject suffers 'an extraordinary diminution in his self-regard, an impoverishment of the ego on a grand scale' (1953: 246). Melancholia has subsequently been extensively theorised, notably by Christian Gundermann in *Actos melancólicos* with relation to the Southern Cone project of officially-sanctioned amnesia, as offering the political critique *par excellence*, since the melancholic relationship to the lost object initiates a process of positive disavowal of the status quo. Faced with an enforced negation of trauma and subsequent nationally-sanctioned amnesia, the politically-progressive artwork, according to Gundermann, has been concerned

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<sup>47</sup> Gelman won several prestigious poetry prizes, including the *Premio Cervantes* in 2007, and was often cited as a possible future Nobel Laureate. In 2000, Zurita won the prestigious National Poetry Prize of Chile, and his poetry has been repeatedly critically lauded, including by Ignacio Valente, a renowned Chilean literary critic, aligned with the political right, who was also a priest and member of Opus Dei (and is the model for Roberto Bolaño's fictional literary critic Urrutia Lacroix in *Nocturno de Chile*).

with a certain kind of memorialisation that is based in a repetition of trauma and a refusal to consign the past to memory (2007: 20). The theoretical promise of the melancholic has similarly been harnessed by Idelber Avelar in *The Untimely Present*. Avelar argues that, against the ideology of the market which eternally requires the production of the new, and the relegation of the past to ‘obsolescence’, the critical role played by artists and intellectuals must be to point out the residues or ruins of the past that linger, in an untimely manner, in the present. Critique of power must point melancholically to the fragments of the past that remain unresolved (1999: 3).

These critical considerations of melancholia in post-dictatorship works of art have added much to the conversation about the way in which trauma can – and should – be represented in the artwork. However, in the case of the poetry written by Zurita and Gelman, a focus on the melancholic remainders present in their work does not offer a complete picture of their respective political aesthetics. I contend that both Gelman and Zurita, while retaining a commitment to the melancholic fragment, furthermore work at using the labour of poetry as the basis for a future project of communitarian production. I suggest that they propose a labour of creation for their poetry that envisages not only the melancholic refusal to allow fragmentation to give way to wholeness, or to permit trauma to pass into oblivion, but also a political project envisaging a new possibility for an – albeit partial and compromised – vision of community. This permits the poems themselves to function as creative acts of politics, beyond even the aesthetic labour of the fragment envisaged by Nelly Richard. As Richard articulated in *The Insubordination of Signs*:

The critique of totality and of seamless identities produced by the aesthetic of the fragment reveals a kind of active negativity or representational flaw [...]. It makes visible, in the domain of what we call ‘culture’, those fissures and points of disjunction in which society does not completely coincide with itself. (2004b: 81)

Both poets certainly confront a similar challenge: that of exposing this disjunction in attempting to articulate the unspeakable in affective terms, insisting upon the compulsive repetition of loss, and resisting the temptation to produce a work that reductively operates within the transparency of meaning that the consumer-driven market demands. However, the work of both poets also demonstrates a persistent adherence to a certain political ideal. Rather than a strategic melancholia which refuses the present in order to enforce a recognition of the past, the poets use their work to posit a present and a future that is founded in a sense of egalitarian community.

This community finds its foundation in the expression of hope which is simultaneous with trauma and loss (but which does not supersede or transcend it). Zurita describes a vision of optimism for the future at the very moment of imprisonment and torture in his collection *Anteparaiso*, in the first poem from the first section ‘Las utopías’:

Como en un sueño, cuando todo estaba perdido  
 Zurita me dijo que iba a amainar  
 porque en lo más profundo de la noche  
 había visto una estrella. Entonces  
 acurrucado contra el fondo de tablas del bote  
 me pareció que la luz nuevamente  
 iluminaba mis apagados ojos.  
 Eso bastó. Sentí que el sopor me invadía: (1982: 23)

This poem, written from heart of the poet’s personal trauma, is illuminating in more senses than one. The combination of the total desolation and destruction wreaked by the dictatorship (‘todo estaba perdido’) with the glimmer of hope and light (‘una estrella’) to which the former gives way suggests the creative political potential with which Zurita imbues his poetry. The colon with which the poem ends, leading the reader onwards to an encounter with the poetic expression of the text as a whole, places the labour of *poiesis* very clearly at the heart of the project for a new community that Zurita envisages throughout his work.

Gelman emphasises a similar belief in poetic labour as the basis for an erasure of a kind of collectivity that is founded in difference, and a source instead of a community of equality based in shared labour. In a striking reversal of Neruda’s poem in which the labourer is finally granted access to the work of art and therefore comes to recognise the comradeship uniting his own life and that of the poet, in his poem ‘Escrituras’ from *Relaciones*, Gelman places the pen in the hand of the worker, describing the writings of the miners in ‘la mina de wolfram’ of La Carolina:

pero arriba ¿se puede leer?  
 ¿hay quien lee los mensajes que escriben los mineros abajo?  
 ¿se pueden leer verdaderamente esos mensajes?  
 ‘Perón es nuestra única esperanza’ dice uno  
 [...]
 ellos escriben aunque nadie los lea  
 escriben en las paredes de la mina  
 escriben con sus lámparas de carburo  
 escriben bajo la noche profunda (1980: 17)

Ben Bollig argues that this poem perpetuates the division between manual and intellectual labour since it ‘suggests that certain forms of writing are preferred to others. The poem itself is read, while the miners’ writings, underground, are not, except in the context of this poem’ (2003: 177). However, I suggest rather that the value ascribed to the word in general here is clear, highlighted through the anaphoric repetition of ‘escriben’ in the final stanza, and arises, unlike in Neruda’s vision, from the very fact of its being uttered or written, not from a validation afforded it by virtue of the numbers who may read it.

Gelman elsewhere refuses to privilege the poetic word above other forms of expression. Víctor Rodríguez Núñez writes that the poet ‘concibe el trabajo poético como un oficio como cualquier otro’ (2001: 155), and cites as an example his intertextuality with high artistic precursors, the claimed inheritance of popular culture, and the use of non-literary sources such as journalistic and political material. It is for this reason that in ‘Confianzas’, another poem from the *Relaciones* collection, Gelman, while recognising the political limitations of the poetic project, refuses to cede his labour of *poiesis*:<sup>48</sup>

se sienta a la mesa y escribe  
 «con este poema no tomarás el poder» dice  
 «con estos versos no harás la Revolución» dice  
 «ni con miles de versos harás la Revolución» dice [...]  
 se sienta a la mesa y escribe (1980: 28)

The repetition of the line which opens and closes the poem functions similarly to Zurita’s colon in the above-cited first poem of the *Canto a su amor desaparecido*. The poetry points forward to the poetic labour that follows, and invests it with a certain hope in the construction of new (but always uncompleted and endlessly fragmented) communities. However, it also points to Gelman’s belief in the non-instrumental relationship between poetry and politics. Poetry does not itself bring about political change. Yet as with Rancière’s insistence upon the political promise implicit in aesthetics under the aesthetic regime, it appears here that Gelman continues to assert a certain value for the labour of poetry which may be translated into political value under the right circumstances.

The desire for community in the work of both poets is tempered by an awareness of the problematic location of any ideology of community: this poetic labour works against the neoliberal focus on the individual, but remains aware of the problematic potential for

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<sup>48</sup> In the next collection *Hechos*, Gelman in fact explicitly refers to poetry as a labourer, with a representative responsibility. ‘La poesía’ is ‘obrero/que el enemigo no puede secuestrar/delegada/de estos abrazos/estas vidas’ (1997: 68).

community's affiliation with a totalitarian project. To this end, it is useful briefly to investigate the theory of the 'inoperative community' (1991) proposed by the French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, as the parameters within which this theory operates coincide strongly with the project of hope founded in trauma and despair that I identify in the work of both Zurita and Gelman. Nancy's conception of community responds to the problematic essentialising of being that is the result of the emphasis on the individual as the subject of politics in Western thought. This essentialising of selfhood denies the existence of any relationality with an other, and thus, the possibility for truly democratic politics. As Stella Gaon explains, Nancy's text identifies a common logic between 'liberal democracies and totalitarian regimes by virtue of how, in both cases, the possibility of alterity, the possibility of transcendence and, thus, the possibility of a contestation of power, are utterly foreclosed' (2005: 398). Nancy therefore focuses instead on a presentation of community which is other than an essence: it is not people, nor nation, nor humanity. Community is, rather, simultaneous with and dependent upon a conception of *alterity* as intrinsic to being.

The absolute – or immanent – individual ('being-without-relation') is, Nancy argues, a logical impossibility: 'one cannot make a world of simple atoms. [...] There has to be an inclination or an inclining from one toward the other, of one by the other, or from one to the other' (1991: 3). The individual, as an immanent being existing only for- and in-itself cannot actually exist, since an immanence cannot 'be' unto another immanence: any conception of relation between absolute individuals is therefore logically impossible. The idea that an individual can be both individual and connected is nonsensical. This leads Nancy to a problematising of two principal strands of thought: humanism and communism. Both are problematic because they endow the individual with an inalienable and therefore immanent essence: either his labour or his humanness provide the basis for an essentialised conception of community in these narratives, and they are thus founded in the absolute and in immanence. This focus on the individual as somehow essential can, Nancy suggests, end only in totalitarianism.

Against the conceptualising of the individual and hence the community in terms of essence, Nancy posits community as the ability to break apart a metaphysics that is founded in the absolute. As Ana Luszczynska describes it, 'the relation itself denies the possibility of the absolute by tearing and forcing apart that which would like to be absolutely closed' (2005: 174). Community can do this because it is founded in, and simultaneous with, the finitude (or mortality) of the singular being. After Bataille, Nancy suggests that the awareness of death (of the self and the other) is vital in the exposition of being as singular rather than

immanent, and therefore as the subject of community. Moreover, death must be understood as meaningless, and it is in its very meaninglessness that it acquires meaning for community: a senseless meaning, or a meaning beyond meaning. It is the conception of the being as finite, brought to an end by a death whose meaning cannot be recuperated for any absolute project, that permits the relationship with the other that underlies Nancy's conception of community: 'Community is revealed in the death of others; hence it is always revealed to others. Community is what takes place always through others and for others' (1991: 15). Community is therefore the presentation or exposition of the finitude of being. The being who lives with the consciousness of finitude is, in Nancy's terms, an 'ecstatic' being. Ecstasy is being outside of being – being towards an other being – or non-immanent being.

The community is described as inoperative by Nancy because it cannot be a work or a project: insofar as singular being exists, so does community, since singularity is dependent upon relationality.

One does not produce it, one experiences or one is constituted by it as the experience of finitude. Community understood as a work or through its works would presuppose that the common being, as such, be objectifiable and producible (in sites, persons, buildings, discourses, institutions, symbols; in short, in subjects). (1991: 31)

Therefore, both the nostalgic longing for a lost community, and the hopeful positing of a future community are equally fictitious. Community and being occur simultaneously, without mediation. Community is being-with, which is inseparable from being. Therefore, as Luszczynska explains, 'Community neither works to achieve anything that can be considered a product nor is comprised of anything higher or more transcendent than the beings within it or, more precisely, the beings for whom being is finite' (2005: 181). In this sense, Nancy distinguishes between *community*, which is characterised by communication, and *communion*. Communion seeks a transcendent absolute and its goal is fusion with the immanent body, while communication between singular beings respects the finitude and relationality that necessarily govern being. A community which seeks communion, and to overcome finitude, ends not in singularity but in singleness (or totalitarianism). As Nancy writes, 'Fascism was the grotesque or abject resurgence of an obsession with communion; it crystallized the motif of its supposed loss and the nostalgia for its images of fusion' (1991: 17). Since finitude is not absolute, it cannot commune, but it can be exposed or presented: it can communicate. This communication is also designated 'compearance', by Nancy and

consists in the appearance of the between as such: you and I (between us) – a formula in which the *and* does not imply juxtaposition, but exposition. What is exposed in compearance is the following, and we must learn to read it in all its possible combinations: ‘you (are/and/is) (entirely other than) I’. Or again, more simply, ‘you shares me’. (Ibid: 29)

The you is other, but also shares and divides the self, exposing its finitude, and hence its belonging to community. The you and the I are therefore totally interdependent: Nancy’s theory is one of a radical interdependence of being. The precondition of the community is the recognition of the other.

While this chapter continues to work within a Rancièrian framework of the aesthetic and political assumption of equality of beings, this incorporation of Nancy permits us to give conceptual body to Rancière’s imagining of the political or democratic community, described in *Disagreement* as:

a community of interruptions, fractures, irregular and local, through which egalitarian logic comes and divides the police community from itself. It is a community of worlds in community that are intervals of subjectification: intervals constructed between identities, between spaces and places. Political being-together is a being-between: between identities, between worlds. (1999: 137)

This insistence on the endlessly liminal and unstable is a source of potential critique of Rancière’s political philosophy, since, as Peter Hallward argues, the notion of the interval seems incompatible with any kind of relation – both negative relations of oppression, exploitation, and representation, and positive relations of solidarity, cooperation, and empowerment. As Hallward writes, ‘true equality remains fully independent of social mediation [...]. In the absence of such mediation, however, Rancière’s trenchant egalitarianism seems perfectly compatible with a certain degree of social resignation, even an almost passive acceptance of de facto inequalities’ (2005: 42). However, when read concomitantly with Nancy’s emphasis on the relationality of community, this being-between posited by Rancière can be understood as the expression of a similar relationality: equality can only be verified as a collective project of community, since intelligence, which Rancière presupposes to be equal, is defined precisely through contact with the other.

But how does this relate to the poetry under discussion in this chapter? In spite of positing community and being as logically and necessarily simultaneous, by the end of his text, Nancy gestures towards the idea that some contexts may be ‘more or less conducive to the being of community’ (Luszczynska, 2005: 194). Community, under Nancy’s terms,



cannot disappear altogether, but there can be societies that operate with the will to immanence, which is also the will to destroy community: to illustrate this notion, Nancy uses the example of ‘the fascist masses’ and ‘the concentration camp’ (1991: 35). Luszczynska therefore assumes that the opposite must be true, and that there must be some empirical conditions that permit the flourishing of community. She suggests that these conditions arise from the *imagining* of such contexts, and principally, from the imagining of a structure ‘that is open to absolute alterity, that is, to the absolute impossibility of immanence’ (2005: 197). In other words, the individual as immanent being must no longer be imagined at the centre of society, but rather instead, the relationality of beings must be centralised. Nancy’s community cannot move straightforwardly from theory to practice – it cannot be realised through work (hence its status as inoperative) – but the idea of the community can be communicated. This means that the literary or artistic form, which presents the possibility of a re-distribution of the sensible in Rancièrian terms, provides the ideal sphere for the re-imagining of being and community founded in relationality. The literary or artistic sphere, returning to Nancy’s terminology, can communicate, or expose, or compear with community. It can express the sharing of finitude between singularities that underlies community.

It is precisely this radical interdependence of finite beings, founded in the meaningful meaninglessness of death that, I argue, characterises the work of Gelman and Zurita. Their commitment to fragmentation and their resistance of wholeness is more than just a melancholic insistence that a traumatic past be recognised by an amnesiac present. It is a political project to found a new community. The poets posit a community that is founded in fragmentation and finitude, and that therefore permits a new understanding of the relationship between self and other. This relationship is utterly interdependent, and is based in a total equality because it arises from the mutual exposition of the finitude of being.

### ***Fragmentation and Deferred Redemption***

The argument that conceives that political resistance in post-dictatorship art is located in a melancholic refusal to relinquish past trauma can easily be made in the case of Gelman and Zurita’s poetry. In the first place, the socio-political reality to which the poetry is responding is that of an amnesiac present, and so the counter-impulse to foreground a melancholic attachment to trauma is clearly a factor in both cases. As such, for both poets the compulsive repetition of trauma in the work is, in and of itself, an aesthetico-political

statement. During and in the aftermath of the military dictatorships in Argentina and Chile, a consensual silencing of past horrors characterised the political sphere. The consistent denial of horror during the dictatorships gave way to an official policy of amnesia in both nations (including amnesty for those who committed human rights violations) as a prerequisite of future democracy, although in both countries the idea of investigating and commemorating the atrocities did receive an initial impetus. As Gelman states in interview with Edith Dимо, the problem lay not in the fact of an actual amnesia or ignorance, but in the generalised rejection of an ‘actitud activa de ejercicio de la memoria’ (1993: 111).

As discussed in the introduction to this work, this rejection of memory became an official policy in both Chile and Argentina, in spite of initial putative commitments to memorialisation. In Chile, the *Concertación* government of Aylwin published a list of disappeared people in 1990, erected a monument to the victims in the *Cementerio General*, and created the *Comisión de Verdad y Reconciliación* in order to investigate the horrors committed under the dictatorship. This latter had no judicial powers, and amnesty was soon given for human rights crimes committed between 1973 and 1978. Meanwhile, in the newly democratic Argentina, there was a more thorough beginning to the investigation of human rights abuses, with the creation in 1983 of CONADEP, the *Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparación de Personas*, which in 1984 published a lengthy report on the human rights violations entitled *Nunca Más*. However, after five months in which members of the military junta were subjected to trial, and in some cases sentenced, Alfonsín’s government called the process to a halt, implementing the *Ley de Obediencia Debida*, which afforded amnesty to most members of the armed forces. By 1990, any offenders still in prison were given presidential pardons and released. In the work of both Gelman and Zurita, this amnesiac political environment is fundamental to the way in which death and trauma are centralised in the aesthetic choices of both authors. However, as I go on to argue, the emphasis on death and the traumatic past is not merely a melancholic blocking of the political status quo, but also functions as a productive political choice. Fragmentation is centralised precisely because death in this poetry becomes the paradoxically non-foundational foundation for a new kind of community. In other words, rather than being an end in itself, this insistence upon the fragmentary and melancholic functions as a means of recognition of the finitude (in Nancy’s terms) on which community is founded, and thus of establishing the recognition of relationality of being and otherness.

As previously discussed, according to Nancy, community is dependent upon an experience outside the self, namely, death. As Christopher Fynsk explains in the Foreword to *The Inoperative Community*, death and community are both inoperative:

Death is an experience that a collectivity cannot make its *work* or its property, in the sense of something that would find its meaning in a value or cause transcending the individual. A society may use it (in the celebrations of heroes or the sacrificial victims), but there is a point at which death exposes a radical meaninglessness that cannot be subsumed, and when death presents itself as not *ours*, the very impossibility of representing its meaning suspends or breaches the possibility of self-presentation and exposes us to our finitude. Nancy argues with Bataille [...] that this exposure is also an opening to community: outside ourselves, we first encounter the other. (1991: xvi)

The others that collectively form the community are revealed to be endlessly interdependent and relational in the revelation of the death of the self and of others. In the case of Zurita's poetry, the endless repetition of death and trauma functions to ensure that an awareness of finitude constantly underlies the poetic project, and is linked inextricably to an awareness of the relationality of being through a focus on love that is simultaneous with (but that does not transcend) death.

Zurita's *oeuvre* is founded in destruction, loss, and trauma, which are enacted not only within his verse, but also on the landscape and on the poet's own body. A great deal has already been written about Zurita's poetic actions of corporeal mutilation: contemporaneous with the publishing of *Purgatorio* he branded his own cheek, and then in 1980 attempted to burn out his eyes with ammonium acid, an enactment violently suggesting the impossibility of witnessing horror (but also of witnessing beauty after horror). William Rowe, reading this collection, asserts the importance of the uncoded landscape (here, the body as framework for art) in creating a new symbolic regime. He argues that Zurita's action functions to extract love from violence:

Zurita's violence against his own face, his self-defacement, needs to be understood as an action a person undertakes when already penetrated by totalitarian violence at a level which cannot be undone by analysis, thereby converting violation into a possibility of tenderness. (2000: 286)

In other words, in Rowe's terms, this act offers a counter-signing of that original violation, and hence a reclamation of agency from the emotional location of love rather than hate. I will develop an argument below that builds on Rowe's assertion of the importance of love to Zurita's political aesthetic. However, I contend that in his analysis of Zurita's self-violation

here Rowe tends to envisage the repetition of trauma as a cathartic working through rather than as the melancholic insistence upon the presence of the traumatic past. This reading furthermore places Zurita's action within a redemptive (avant-garde) paradigm which, I argue, the poet in fact evades. It is certainly possible to read Zurita in the light of a certain heroic messianism, with the poet as sacrificial redeemer of the nation, or of a re-inscription of monumentalism following his destruction of all aesthetic codes – in particular, consider his sky-writing and writing in the desert.<sup>49</sup> Such a reading would highlight the disjuncture between the politics inscribed within his formal fragmentation and a paradoxical re-founding of the avant-garde division of labour. However, I argue that in Zurita's work, the redemption that appears to follow trauma and despair is, in fact, endlessly deferred. Consequently, the tension between the desire for individuality and the desire for collectivity in his work may indeed lead us to a conception of community as relationality, as in Nancy's vision.

This analysis focuses on Zurita's poetic production from 1979 and through the decade of the 1980s as being most representative of his political concern with dictatorship and its immediate aftermath. In this poetry, Zurita's representation of trauma is the principal constant. In *Purgatorio* (1979), his corporeal self-mutilation is poetically enacted, and becomes the starting point for a destruction of cohesive selfhood that incorporates a schizoid splitting of the self, a transgendered identification, and a resignification of psychiatric codes through a making-physical of the psyche. This is combined with a meditation on landscape – the 'Desierto de Atacama' series – in which the physical setting becomes a fertile ground for an exploration of sin, trauma, and redemption. In *Anteparaíso* (1982), the emphasis on landscape becomes more pronounced, with the wounds of the nation reflected in its physical features, especially in the first section entitled 'Las playas de Chile' and the later 'Pastoral' section which is, as mentioned, a darkly travestied version of the traditional form resulting from the traumatic past to which the nation has been subject. Finally, the *Canto a su amor*

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<sup>49</sup> This is the reading posited by Chilean author Roberto Bolaño, who persistently parodies Zurita, first in *La literatura nazi en América*, a fictional encyclopedia of right-wing writers published in 1996, and subsequently in his 1996 novel *Estrella distante*. The characters Carlos Ramírez Hoffman and Carlos Wieder stand in for Zurita according to Bolaño's vision, most notably repeating his actions of poetic sky-writing. In interview with Marcelo Soto, Bolaño makes the explicit claim for messianism in the work of Zurita: 'Zurita me parece absolutamente mesiánico. En sus referencias a Dios, a la resurrección de Chile; él en su poesía busca la salvación de Chile, que supone va a llegar mediante claves místicas o no racionales. Zurita le da la espalda a la ilustración e intenta, formalmente, llegar a la raíz primigenia del hombre. Poéticamente, resulta muy seductor, pero yo la verdad es que no creo en esas escatologías' (Braithwaite, 2006: 113). Yet through the alignment of Zurita as 'messianic' writer with the fascists Ramírez Hoffman and Wieder, Bolaño seeks to make a wider point about the ultimate nature of literature as being always open to capture by evil, or indeed being itself a form of violence. My reading of Zurita and the other artists and writers under study in this work aims to counter this conception of the de facto alignment of literature and evil, instead pointing to the aesthetic itself as a profoundly politically progressive domain.

*desaparecido* (1985) deals most explicitly with the marking of the landscape by torture, violence, and death which is more implicit in the first two collections.

The *Canto*, although published last, is in fact a good place to start in a consideration of Zurita's vision for the landscape as a site for the repetition of trauma, and the function this fulfils with regard to the creation of a future community. Explicitly referring to the context of disappearance and murder, this poem is set in a national reality in which nothing but torture and murder remain:

Canté la canción de los viejos galpones de concreto. Unos sobre otros decenas de nichos los llenaban. En cada uno hay un país, son como niños, están muertos. Todos yacen allí, países negros, áfrica y sudacas. Yo les canté así de amor la pena a los países. Miles de cruces llenaban hasta el fin el campo. (1985: 11)

The dramatic alteration in signification to which the poetry responds is evidenced in the incongruous juxtaposition of the descriptive adjectives referring to the 'nichos': they are both childlike and dead. From the outset, then, Zurita places his poetry within a context in which all representative norms must be reconsidered.

This responds to the inexorable exposition of the – always officially unacknowledged and hence endlessly repeated – death of the other. Elsewhere in the *Canto*, Zurita focuses intensely upon the loss of the other: 'dónde está mi hijo' (1985: 9). Similarly, the poetic repetition of death is a recurring image: 'Murió mi chica, murió mi chico, desaparecieron todos./ Desiertos de amor' (Ibid: 12). It also responds to the intense physical and emotional violence inflicted upon the self, such that the finitude of both self and other are never far from the poetic consciousness. Furthermore, the memorialisation that the poetry offers (the construction of the cemetery with its 'nichos' filled with the trauma of nations) is very far from the official voice of limited memory, or from a conception of a melancholically haunting return of the past, but rather encompasses also the sordid, the corporeal, and the more-than-spectral presence of past horror:

- Sí, sí miles de cruces llenaban hasta el fin el campo.
- Llegué desde los sitios más lejanos, con toneladas de cerveza adentro y ganas de desaguar.
- Así llegué a los viejos galpones de concreto.
- De cerca eran cuarteles rectangulares, con sus vidrios rotos y olor a pichí, semen, sangre y moco hendían. (Ibid: 11)

Memory is therefore not posited as a nostalgic idealisation of the past, nor as a spectre disrupting the present from its position at the margins, but rather as the traumatic corporeal



The lucidity of expression is dramatically disrupted here, and the poetic self/victim returns to that 'state anterior to language' which for Scarry is torture's intended effect (1985: 4).

Zurita's poem nonetheless retains its figurative power as this linguistic breakdown becomes an expressive evocation of trauma. In so doing, it works to involve the reader viscerally both through the pain which is made disturbingly evident, and through the demand for oral articulation which the non-verbal form implies. While the affective enunciation refers clearly to the breakdown in traditional forms of representation, it is also linked here to a pre-subjective or immanent plane, being related to the body's unconscious attractions or repulsions.<sup>50</sup> This focus on the pre-subjective, affective sphere has vital implications for the relationality between self and other that Zurita proposes, as will be explained in full detail below. Affect generates (e)motion between bodies, and forces crossings and exchanges in these in-between spaces. As Gregg and Seigworth argue, affect is 'found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, *and* in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves' (2010: 1). Zurita's appeal to pre-subjective, immanent affective forces not only places his poetry within a firmly corporeal realm, but also reveals, in the intensities passing between self and other, the possibility of a new radical conception of relationality.

The breakdown of language and its replacement with un-channelled corporeal affect finds its ultimate expression in Zurita's exploration of his own body as a controversial site for artistic expression, and in the subsequent documentation of this act in poetry. Zurita's violences against his own body have been written as part of his poetic production. In *Anteparalso*, Diamela Eltit interjects a note into the work describing Zurita's attempt to blind himself. And in *Purgatorio* Zurita himself poetically documents his accomplished act of self-mutilation. The poet thus performatively inscribes his actions into the poetry such that artistic persona, action, and aesthetic production become inseparable. The self-mutilation described in *Purgatorio* (XXII) indicates a poetic collision with the limits of representational language, which is shown to be inadequate in affectively responding to violence:

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<sup>50</sup> In *The Affect Theory Reader*, Gregg and Seigworth define the affective in the following way: 'Affect, at its most anthropomorphic, is the name we give to those forces – visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion – that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations, or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world's apparent intractability. Indeed, affect is persistent proof of a body's never less than ongoing immersion in and among the world's obstinacies and rhythms, its refusals as much as its invitations' (2010: 1).

Destrocé mi cara tremenda  
frente al espejo  
te amo –me dije- te amo

Te amo a más que nada en el mundo (1985: 17)

The violence which power exerts on the body is mimetically reflected and exposed in this poetic act of auto-incision. However, the poem evinces an ambiguous response since the poet is the agent both of his own defacement, and of the fragmentation of his individual subjectivity. The self-harm represents both an (arguably perverse) evasion of the biopolitical control of bodies (violence is enacted by the self not by another), and a performative flight from an ideology in which corporeal wholeness uniquely structures power. It also demonstrates the impossibility of corporeal or spiritual wholeness post-trauma, and evokes frameworks of mental illness that are further explored later in the collection. However, it can also possibly – and problematically – enact the construction of the poet as a self-sacrificing, Christ-like figure whose wounds are configured as necessary to the redemption of the nation. I will return to this tendency towards messianism in Zurita's work below. At this juncture, however, William Rowe's reading of Zurita's use of the symbolically uncoded proves helpful.

As mentioned above, Rowe argues that the de-framing effect of Zurita's use of alternative 'canvasses' for his art permits the poet to move outside the modernist and avant-garde paradigms. The landscape and the body are both symbolically 'uncoded' realms which are therefore not compromised by either of the 'two communicative regimes, one which sought to prolong the language and the values of the previous Popular Unity government (broadly socialist) and the other which sought to impose those of the military government (authoritarian and neo-liberal)' (2000: 296). Rowe suggests that, while in *Purgatorio*, Zurita attempts to move outside language (specifically the logos) altogether, owing to his extreme distrust for the word and its potential for appropriation, in the later *Anteparaiso*, he attempts 'to occupy the spaces of language and imagination that religion, the State, and advertising have taken possession of' (Ibid: 318). It is important also to note that Zurita's constant gesturing towards that which cannot be said (at least by traditional means) is part of a generalised desire to create a poetry that is inscrutable to power. Of course, this cements Zurita's place within the *avanzada* as described by Nelly Richard, in which the inscrutability of the artwork to power is a key reason behind the generalised drive to insubordinate



resignification which she identifies as characteristic of the political artwork under dictatorship (Richard, 2004).

In interview with Juan Andrés Piña, Zurita describes the effect of his inscrutable poetry when confronted with the absolute power of the dictatorship. Recalling his arrest in the first days of the military regime, Zurita describes how the poetry he was carrying at the time (an early version of some of the text of *Purgatorio*) became a further source of accusation against him. ‘Para peor yo tenía ahí unos poemas en estilo vanguardista, con dibujitos. Y entonces me preguntaban qué significaba eso. Yo les contestaba que eran poemas. “¿Creís que somos huevones?” me decían, y empezaba la tremenda pateadura’ (Piña, 2006, cited in Kuhnheim, 2004: 73). According to Jill Kuhnheim:

Zurita’s words and drawings are perceived by the incipient dictatorship’s frontlines as unintelligible and, since they ask to see the folder again and again, possibly a secret code and therefore suspicious. The guard’s defensive reaction implies that he knows what poetry is and this isn’t it. Later in the story, another guard on the ship looks at the folder once more and decides yes, these are poems, and tosses them overboard. Recognized as poems, they lose all interest and escape further interrogation. (2004: 73)

The poetry does indeed ‘escape’ further interrogation by this action on the part of the guard. However, to suggest that the words are rendered harmless by their demarcation as poetry – in other words, by being understood to belong to an aesthetic sphere that is outside or beyond the political – is to ignore the fact that they are nevertheless destroyed in the guard’s act. For that destruction is itself a recognition, by dictatorship and its repressive mechanisms, of the danger posed by a poetry that remains inscrutable to its codifying and de-codifying mechanisms.

The movement beyond language – beyond the logos – remains then, in part, a classic *avanzada* technique to unsettle the codifying structures of dictatorial power. However, the erasure of linguistic signs performed by the insistent insertion of the corporeal and affective into the poetry additionally functions as a mimetic representation of the emptiness caused by trauma. There is a sense in which Zurita suggests that beyond the finitude of self and other, nothing remains to be said. However, this is only part of the story, since there is also a perpetual gesturing towards an (always incomplete) redemption in the poetry. For Zurita, the finitude that underlies all his work is never the final word, becoming instead the basis for a community founded in the full awareness of that finitude and therefore in the absolute relationality of self and other. Above all, this emerges in the poetry in the emphasis on love

which, while not transcending death, coexists alongside it. Even in the achingly bleak, desolate *Canto*, the landscape remains the site for the tenacious presence of love:

**Todo mi amor está aquí y se ha quedado:**

– *Pegado a las rocas al mar y a las montañas.*

– *Pegado, pegado a las rocas al mar y a las montañas.* (1985: 12)

In his article ‘Expanded Fields’, Jens Andermann argues that here Zurita seeks out the borderlands of landscape in order to convert endless trauma into resources of newfound life and community: ‘Deserts, coast and cordilleras – inert, uninhabitable, mineral nature – provide locales of refuge here to which the radical longing for a “new life” beyond violence can adhere’ (2012: 173). In his engraving of ‘amor’ into the landscape of Chile, Zurita performs ‘the re-inscription of love into the very place of abandonment’ (Ibid: 174). However, Zurita’s relationship with the landscape remains profoundly fragmentary since the adhesion of love and landscape ‘does not attempt to force out the appearance of a place for mourning and, thus, the re-composition of a frame of recognition, shattered by the absence of proper burial’ (Ibid: 174). Rather, we are left with an overwhelming sense of ruin, fragmentation, incompleteness, and negativity.

The choice of landscape (not the neatly contained urban memory garden, but the wild and uncontrollable desert, sea, and mountains) is additionally significant for its ability to ‘resist not just the marks of historical violence but *any kind of enduring inscription*’, recalling human ‘ephemerality in the face of natural rhythms’ (2012: 174). Yet Andermann argues that Zurita’s engagement with the landscape does not end with a vision of ruin and fragmentation, but rather that ‘the desert, the sea and the mountains are also the spaces of a radical experiment of *trans-figuration*: of the constant, performative un- and remaking of the founding metaphors of nationhood’ (Ibid). In Andermann’s terms, this is because the ‘metonymic binding together of body and land provides the foundation for the space of writing’ (Ibid) which marks the possibility of redemption through his work. However, throughout his poetic production, Zurita is frequently concerned with destroying or violating both body and landscape as sites for the future foundation of community, and therefore, I suggest that Zurita’s relationship with writing and redemption needs to be examined more fully.

In the poetry of both *Purgatorio* and *Anteparaíso*, the landscape is more ambiguously marked as a site of both despair and of potential redemption. The landscape as site for community is both subject to an intense dissolution (see the below citation in which the

Atacama Desert is envisaged as ‘diluyéndose/entre auras’), and is simultaneously re-imagined as the site for a (flawed, fragmented) collectivity. Amongst the most striking in this respect are his extensive odes to the Atacama Desert in *Purgatorio* which offer a quasi-metaphysical linking of the physical landscape with a spiritual notion of redemption. The combination of the physical and the spiritual in Zurita’s descriptions of the desert are typical of his understanding of the corporeal realm and the possibilities it offers for redemptive processes. The desert is the site of both fecundity and sterility, associated with the sensual mother-figure and with the destructive wind which sweeps across ‘las áridas llanuras’. It has both a physical and metaphysical reality, such that in addition to its very real existence it is described in ‘Desierto de Atacama II’ as:

- i. Suspendido    sobre el cielo de Chile    diluyéndose  
entre auras. (1979: 40)

The physical spacing between the words as displayed on the page formally contributes to the effect of weightlessness (the spiritual) which the poetry invokes on behalf of the nation. It additionally points to the literal dissolution of the landscape as grounding or foundational for any notion of the communal. What is more, the desert is paradoxically associated both with sin and redemption. The Atacama is ‘manchado’, ‘maldito’, and composed of ‘coquinas pampas’ (1979: 30-2). These figurations, in Eugenia Brito’s words, invoke both ‘la connotación bíblica de pecado’ and the fear of the object: ‘el horror del objeto contemplado’ (1990: 97).

Yet simultaneously, the desert, when forced into the gaze of the poetic interlocutor, symbolises a potential reclamation of the nation following the destructive onset of dictatorship:

- i. Miremos entonces el Desierto de Atacama

- ii. Miremos nuestra soledad en el desierto

Para que desolado frente a estas fachas el paisaje  
devenga una cruz extendida sobre Chile y la soledad de mi  
facha vea entonces el redimirse de las otras fachas:    mi  
propia Redención en el Desierto (1979: 50)

Here, the emancipatory project envisioned through the national landscape has an overwhelmingly personal, individual charge, which is conveyed primarily through Christian imagery. However, the consistently unresolved dualities which the desert is made to embody

in the poetry make it, according to Zurita, an ideal metonymic reflection for the national reality. The Atacama Desert and Chile enjoy a relationship that is ‘convergente y divergente’ (Ibid: 48). Both are the site of paradox and contradiction, and both are subject to a fragmentary solitude which can nevertheless be redeemed through a poetically determined project of collectivity.

This commitment to the collective saves Zurita from charges of repeating Neruda’s vanguardist claim to spiritual leadership in *Las alturas de Macchu Picchu*, and demands re-inspection of the poetry’s putative messianism. At many points in *Purgatorio*, the poet appears to assume the role of messianic spokesperson for the dispossessed. Indeed, at points Zurita even appears unable to separate his own personal sacrifice from the collective redemption that he envisages. At one point, the poet imagines himself becoming the fecund mother – ‘Yo mismo seré las piernas abiertas de mi madre’ (1979: 38) – who will initiate his own rebirth. Later, his own physical sacrifice is shot through with collective aspirations. In the line ‘mi mejilla es el cielo estrellado y los lupanares de Chile’ (Ibid: 92), Zurita’s mutilated cheek stands in a relation of metonymy both to the sublimely transcendental (the starry heavens) and to the socially ajeet (the brothel). However, the redemptive process is incomplete until it is envisaged as part of a broader collective redemption. The poet’s Christ-like wandering through the desert and subsequent absolution of the individual from sin achieves its full meaning only once the necessary sacrifice can incorporate the multiplicity of the nation:

Para que mi facha comience a tocar tu facha y tu facha  
a esa otra facha y así hasta que todo Chile no sea sino  
una sola facha con los brazos abiertos: una larga facha  
coronada de espinas. (Ibid: 50)

There is an additional risk here that Zurita’s vision for the collective fails to distinguish between what Nancy conceived as ‘community’ and his description of ‘communion’. Communion, which inevitably produces fascism, resists the acknowledgement of the finitude governing the relationality between beings. Zurita’s vision of the ‘sola facha[...]/coronada de espinas’ appears to approach this dangerous transcendence and absolutism for the community of the nation. However, elsewhere Zurita demonstrates his vision of community as an altogether more disjunctive, partial synthesis of self and other. In ‘Como un sueño’, his pronominal linking of the self and the other with the desert in a framework of timelessness (‘YO USTED Y LA NUNCA SOY LA VERDE PAMPA EL DESIERTO DE CHILE’ [Ibid: 32]) indicates

how self and other might be held together in a supplementary relationship. Far from expressing a totalitarian drive to communion, the collapse of the self into the other (or vice versa) is postponed here, for the maintenance of the additive ‘y’ holds open the space between subjects and allows the irreducible differences to remain.

Furthermore, as recognised by Scott Weintraub (2007), the redemption posited by Zurita is never total, nor even completed, and as such falls short of the Nerudean ‘Hablad por mi boca...’. Weintraub focuses on an analysis of the ‘Playas de Chile’ section within *Anteparaiso*, arguing that these poems are characterised by an equivocal or incomplete messianism, and by a self-inhibiting teleology. In other words, the messianic impulses of the poet are undone both as a result of the ruinous disaster at the origin of the poetry (the always present recognition of finitude of self and other) and of the endless deferral of future hope. Even the title of the book, referencing the *Paradise* that Zurita never writes, demonstrates this uncertainty about redemption which, according to Weintraub, means that Zurita cannot be read as a poet-messiah, preaching a redemption that will occur at his hands. The figure of the redeemer is undoubtedly referenced by Zurita but, as in ‘Las playas de Chile V’, he is prefaced by the conditional ‘como si’, and succeeded by the ambiguity of the conditional and imperfect subjunctive moods:

Porque apedreado Chile no encontró un solo justo en sus playas  
sino las sombras de ellos mismos flotantes sobre el aire de  
muerte como si en este mundo no hubiera nadie que los pudiera  
revivir ante sus ojos (1982: 29)

For Weintraub, the ‘temporal dislocations at play in Zurita’s poem evince a guiding thread of conditionality through curious “as if” clauses that have a ghostly relationship to teleology’ (2007: 220). The redemption towards which Zurita gestures is thus posited always in terms of uncertainty and incompleteness. Weintraub identifies the apparent teleological structure in Zurita’s ‘Playas de Chile’ section as being a move from the ‘collective, wounded national body’ to the ‘singular ‘justo’’ (Ibid: 226). However, he argues, the wounds of the collective never disappear, and therefore the *justo*’s work remains necessarily incomplete.

This means that death or finitude never disappears from the poetry, in spite of its juxtaposition with a love that offers the perpetual reinvestment of hope of redemption. Love and death coexist and are equally inescapable in Zurita’s work, such that the hope founded in the former does not undermine the endless recognition of the latter. The messianic hope that some readings of Zurita’s poetry envisage is, therefore, unfounded. The melancholic,

spectral, and intensely traumatic and corporeal presence of death is never undone, but its destructive force can be tempered by love, as evidenced in the following lines from the *Canto*:

**Fue el tormento, los golpes y en pedazos nos rompimos. Yo alcancé a oírte pero la luz se iba. Te busqué entre los destrozados, hablé contigo. Tus restos me miraron y yo te abracé. Todo acabó. No queda nada. Pero muerta te amo y nos amamos, aunque esto nadie pueda entenderlo. (1985: 11)**

The continued fragmentation and the finitude that is related to it is both straightforwardly referred to and evidenced formally here in the use of enjambment. The ‘pedazos’ and ‘restos’ locate otherness in fragmentation, which is a theme similarly evoked by Gelman (see below). Love, therefore, does not cause a rejuvenation of the traumatised nation – it remains the case that ‘no queda nada’ and ‘todo acabó’, with the dying light a clear symbol for lost hope. And yet, the fragmented remains or residues speak, and look upon each other, and embrace. Death is therefore not envisaged by Zurita as the finality beyond which nothing can exist or operate. Rather, his poetry evidences the consistent strength of love in forging relationships between self and other. Zurita continues to place death – the finitude of being – at the centre of his poetry. But the inexplicable force of love cannot be checked.

### ***Alienation and the Fractured Encounter with Otherness***

Similarly, in the case of Gelman’s poetry, finitude appears both in the insistent repetition of a traumatic past and in the fragmentation of a cohesive selfhood and of an aesthetics of formal or linguistic cohesion. Death and trauma pervade the poet’s work, perhaps most noticeably in the *Carta abierta* collection (published in *Interrupciones I*, 1997) which repeats the trauma of the loss of Gelman’s son. These poems bring death to the fore, and insist upon both its meaninglessness (the son is not converted into a transcendental hero, but merely mourned as a human being), and its potential for founding a community characterised by relationality. This latter is achieved in particular through the universalisation of the relationship between father and son. Throughout the collection, Gelman writes of his

grown-up son both as a child and as a little girl, and this is significant in both respects. The confounding of subject positions through the imposition of a feminine marker onto a masculine subject implies a generalised transgendered identification with otherness which recurs throughout Gelman's poetry. I will return to this important point below. However, when it specifically relates either to the poetic voice or to the lost child, the feminising creates an emotional connection through an appeal to the archetypal feminine role of motherhood, as in poem IV where the gender neutral 'pecho' is made maternal through the use of a feminine article:

alma a alma te mira/se encriatura/  
se abre la pecho para recogerte/ (1997: 135)

The infantilising of the (in fact fully grown and politically active) son has the effect both of marking the meaninglessness of death through the emphasis on innocence, and of evoking the intensely personal through the poetry. The son is described as 'hijito', and is placed in conjunction with the trappings of babyhood – his 'pañales' and 'cuna'. The father rocks the baby boy to sleep and tenderly swaddles him.

It is in these poetic evocations of the baby son that the emotive quality of Gelman's poetry most clearly stands out, marked as it is by intense suffering and sorrow. Poem XIII, for instance, is a poignant appeal to the lost child, and a haunting description of personal pain:

¿venís y no te veo?/¿dónde estás  
escondido?/¿seguera que no alcanza  
a distraerme de vos?/gimo en la noche/  
dentro de mí el gemido tengo como

desolación de vos/ausencia herida/  
seca/sola de vos/me visitaste  
hace mucho pañal/salgo de todas  
las cosas para verte/ (Ibid: 144)

Here, language begins to break down as the voice becomes a moan ('gimo', 'gemido'), reflecting the body's affective response to emotional pain. The misspelling of 'ceguera/seguera' posits a further breakdown of normative language, and, as elsewhere in the collection, conveys the childishness of the son (see, for example, the 'bacas/vacas' of poem III).

This process of infantilisation has an effect beyond the evocation of the personal, and the ascription of innocence to the victim. It functions further to involve the reader through the recollection of the everyday and universal. The rocking of a child to sleep is a universal and immediately comprehensible activity, regardless of political or historical specificity.

Gelman's poetry here therefore works to create a connection and correspondence between his experience and those of his readers. According to Leo Tolstoy, such contact is precisely the purpose of art: 'art is one of the means of intercourse between man and man' (2008: 236). Art differs from other methods of human communication for Tolstoy, however, in that it transmits emotions rather than thoughts. His definition of art is therefore as follows:

*To evoke in oneself a feeling one has once experienced, and having evoked it in oneself then, by means of movements, lines, colors, sounds, or forms expressed in words, so to transmit that feeling that others may experience the same feeling – this is the activity of art. (Ibid: 237)*

Art functions as a tool of union between individuals, linking them on the most human level: that of shared commonality of feeling. The aesthetic encounter permits, in Tolstoy's terms, a destruction of the distance dividing self and other:

A real work of art destroys, in the consciousness of the receiver, the separation between himself and the artist – not that alone, but also between himself and all whose minds receive this work of art. In this freeing of our personality from its separation and isolation, in this uniting of it with others, lies the chief characteristic and the great attractive force of art. (Ibid: 239)

Art functions for Jacques Rancière in much the same way as it does for Tolstoy: as an external bridge of communication between two thinking, feeling beings which, by virtue of enforcing a recognition of a shared humanity, constructs a vision of a community of equals.

In *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, Rancière writes:

The impossibility of our *saying* the truth, even when we *feel* it, makes us speak as poets, makes us tell the story of our mind's adventures and verify that they are understood by other adventurers, makes us communicate our feelings and see them shared by other feeling beings. (1991: 64)

Poetry is therefore not concerned with establishing the superiority of the intellect or emotions of the poet over those of the reader. Poets are instinctive adherents to the methods and principles of universal teaching which Rancière explores through his investigation of the pedagogical philosopher Joseph Jacotot, since poetry is a tool of translation which permits



the connection of two separate intellects. Furthermore, the poem is not an object uniquely of the poet's creation. It is rather always re-signified, or counter-translated, by the reader: 'This is the true modesty of the "genius," that is to say, of the emancipated artist: he employs all his art, all his power, to show us his poem as the absence of another that he credits us with knowing as well as he' (1991: 70). And I argue that it is this presupposition of comprehension, and therefore of equality of intellect, that lies behind Gelman's discursive construction of his relationship with his son as one of father/mother-baby. The loss of the son makes Gelman acutely aware of his own position within a relational network of beings, and his endless affective repetition of loss and death functions both to acknowledge that profound relationality, and to denote the thus fragmented self as the foundation for the newly-constructed community.

This latter point needs to be developed further, as it is the fragmentation of cohesive selfhood that permits Gelman's poetry to move towards a conception of community without risking re-founding totalitarianism. Gelman's project is often critically interpreted as moving towards unity and community<sup>51</sup> after the enforced fragmentation of collectivity which the dictatorship enacted. His frequent evocation in the poetry of the 1980s of dead *compañeros*, including and especially his disappeared son, can seem to support this analysis, particularly since the poetic voice often speaks from the position of 'nosotros'. Indeed, his emphatic naming of the deceased recalls Neruda's evocation of the Spanish Civil War dead in 'Explico algunas cosas' in which the poet's series of questions remains tellingly unanswered:

Raúl, te acuerdas?  
Te acuerdas, Rafael?  
Federico, te acuerdas  
debajo de la tierra,  
te acuerdas de mi casa con balcones en donde  
la luz de junio ahogaba flores en tu boca?  
Hermano, hermano! (1951: 49)

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<sup>51</sup> See, for example, Ben Bollig (2011), who posits that Gelman's legacy is divided between those who see him as a key figure in the memorialisation of the Peronist *montonero* movement and the revalorisation of armed struggle as a valid revolutionary tool, and those who understand him as 'an example of the successful reintegration of a former militant as a prize-winning poet, functioning within certain liberal-humanist parameters of memory, (limited) justice and peaceful coexistence' (2011: 66-7). There is a fundamental tension between 'Gelman the committed Peronist and Gelman the reformed humanist' (Ibid: 68), but Bollig argues that in the main, Gelman demonstrates a continued commitment to a *montonero* discursive politics in his poetics – primarily, to the discursive trinity of '*pueblo, patria* and *Perón*'. The poet's project in Bollig's terms is therefore a re-founding of a past (lost and therefore nostalgically mourned) community.

As previously mentioned, this poem (taken from the *Tercera Residencia* collection) marks Neruda's definitive entry into the public sphere, and his self-constitution as poet-prophet speaking to and for the people.

However, the difference between the avant-garde division which Neruda's poem enshrines and Gelman's aesthetic foundation in melancholically-created equality can be found in the latter's evocation of community as endlessly fragmentary, as in poem XII from the collection *Notas* (published in *Interrupciones I*):

y los pedacitos de los compañeros/¿alguna vez se juntarán?  
¿caminan bajo tierra para juntarse un día como dice manuel?/¿se juntarán/un día?  
de esos amados pedacitos está hecha nuestra concreta soledad/  
per/dimos la suavidad de paco/la tristeza de haroldo/la lucidez de/rodolfo/el coraje de  
tantos

ahora son pedacitos desparramados bajo todo el país  
hojitas caídas del fervor/la esperanza/la fe/  
pedacitos que fueron alegría/combate/confianza  
en sueños/sueños/sueños/sueños/ (1997: 110)

The insistence on the fragmentation of community through the repetition of the word 'pedacitos' negates the possibility of any return to wholeness, while the use of virgules visually and linguistically dividing the lines further performs a rupture within sentences, and even, in the case of 'per/dimos', internally within an individual word. The initial euphoria of revolution is evoked through a series of words which point to the possible construction of a cohesive whole: a gathering founded in 'esperanza', 'fe', 'alegría', 'combate', 'confianza en sueños', yet always suspended in a future tense whose conclusion never arrives. Furthermore, the power of that dream dissipates in the final repetition of 'sueños', and is not reconstructed by Gelman, but rather left to echo in a melancholic insistence upon loss and rupture. The effect of the poetry is thus not to create wholeness from fragmentation, but rather to express the ethical and epistemological need to question the terms under which a fragmented political community may be addressed from a position of similarly fractured selfhood.

Gelman therefore explores the possibility of political expression while acknowledging his own alienation from both language and self-knowledge. Throughout his poetry, there is a progressive shift away from normative grammar and punctuation. His earlier collections respect linguistic rules; from *Cólera buey* (1965) onward there is a breakdown of capitalisation and punctuation; and from *Hechos*, his first work written (partially) from exile, the poetry is punctuated brutally with virgules, visually and dramatically foregrounding

division, violence, and rupture. In the *Carta abierta* to the disappeared son, every poem features a heavy emphasis on enjambment, both between lines and between the virgules separating each poetic line internally. In some cases the effect of this is to foreground the sense of loss and fragmentation through poetic form, but in others it leads to a grammatical or syntactical ambiguity which expands the potential meanings of the poetry, as in poem VI:

¿te rejunto otra vez?/¿te apeno el habla?/  
 ¿te duelo el nunca?/¿más?/¿o nunca más  
 me mirará herloseando tu hermosura?/ (1997: 137)

This is a rare moment of explicit political (ideological) expression in this particular collection with the reference to *nunca más*, but the fragmented phrasing evinces a continued commitment to a linguistic complexity in rupture that exceeds the pamphleteering style of much putatively political poetry.

The fragmentation in Gelman's work here is not limited either to an imagined political community, or to the poetic form, but includes also multiple references to a fragmented self. This functions in part as a melancholic reflection on loss and trauma, tied in to the classical Freudian understanding of the pathological response to loss, which involves a dramatic loss of self-regard as a result of the failure to undergo the ego-protecting process of mourning. Gelman performs a loss of selfhood which fits this definition, as seen here in poem XII from the *Carta abierta*:

día que soy fuera de mí/disparos  
 de la verdad hundiéndome la frente/  
 carita que eras/¿ahora disparás?/  
 ¿me sacás del pedazo que llorando?/  
  
 ¿cuerpo que corazono por veremos?/  
 ¿brazo que lato preguntando cómo?/ (1997: 143)

Not only does Gelman state his alienation from his own selfhood in the first line here, he also expresses corporality as being subject to a similar process of alienation. However, he relates his physical experience to an affective relationship with the world, moving away from the cerebral and towards the pure level of a corporeal response to his traumatised reality: the body must become heart ('corazonar') and the arm must beat ('lato') in order for the poetic evocation of the lost son to take place. It is thus an endlessly painful process expressed in intensely personal terms. Finally, the truth of the exposure of finitude shoots her darts into his

forehead, further undermining any sense of cerebrally-constructed (Cartesian) selfhood, and of poetic certainty.

The deconstruction of physical and mental cohesion is produced alongside a de-centring of the poetic self or 'I' by Gelman, and the simultaneous creation of a community of otherness in the poetry, most clearly centred in his poetic employment of heteronyms. Víctor Rodríguez Núñez identifies this as a 'desjerarquización de lo individual ante lo colectivo, de lo personal ante lo social' (2001: 155). According to Rodríguez Núñez, Gelman's use of heteronyms amounts to a straightforward desire on his part to renounce the traditionally privileged position of the lyric poet in favour of an attempt to configure poetic equality. For Ben Bollig, on the other hand, 'the use of pseudonyms both offers Gelman greater room to explore certain themes and paradoxically reinforces the figure of Juan Gelman' (2014: 131). This is because, according to Bollig, Gelman approaches debates about 'literature and politics and, even more specifically, about his own political role as a poet' in and through the heteronymic (or pseudonymic) poetry (Ibid: 138). In other words, his own poetic and political concerns do not disappear in the works authored by the heteronyms. There remains, nevertheless, a clearly expressed desire on the part of Gelman for his poetry to function as a meeting point for the collective. This is made explicit early in Gelman's work in his 'Arte poética' from *Velorio del solo* (1961) (published in *Gotán*):

Entre tantos oficios ejerzo éste que no es mío,  
como un amo implacable  
me obliga a trabajar de día, de noche,  
con dolor, con amor,  
bajo la lluvia, en la catástrofe,  
cuando se abren los brazos de la ternura o del alma,  
cuando la enfermedad hunde las manos.

A este oficio me obligan los dolores ajenos,  
las lágrimas, los pañuelos saludadores,  
las promesas en medio del otoño o del fuego,  
los besos del encuentro, los besos del adiós,  
todo me obliga a trabajar con las palabras, con la sangre.

Nunca fui el dueño de mis cenizas, mis versos,  
rostros oscuros los escriben como tirar contra la muerte. (2004: 97)

Like Neruda, Gelman here places his poetry in the category of labour, and therefore posits a return to *poiesis*: an aesthetic project of creation. Indeed, this poem contains many resonances with Neruda, and particularly with his own 'Arte poética'. In the first place, Gelman

emphasises the external impetus to his poetry: both human reality, and the aesthetic imperative itself. This is couched in terms of reluctance and regret, recalling Neruda's 'me piden lo profético que hay en mí' (2004: 40). Here, also as in Neruda's work, the poetic labour is alienated from the poet – it does not belong to him – and his labour becomes poetic capital that is wrenched from him 'con dolor'. And finally, as in much of Neruda's *oeuvre*, there is a sense of poetry functioning at the limits of language as the verse becomes ash, and mastery over the lines finally escapes the poet altogether.

However, the poem also establishes the two principal concerns which are to characterise Gelman's poetic output: the recounting of pain (sometimes personal, sometimes collective, but principally relating to the forced recognition of finitude through the loss of the other), and the perpetual emphasis on love (and, through love, the encounter with otherness). I argue that it is this latter which saves Gelman from the Nerudean vanguardism (with its marked division of labours) on whose edge he often seems to be teetering. In spite of envisaging a certain appeal to wholeness in the imagining of a future community through the poetics, Gelman's community always retains its damaged and broken nature. The collective voice which he finds in love does not entail the creation of an identity politics based on class, race, or political affinity, and therefore requiring any assumption of equivalence. Instead, it is founded in an equality of humanity founded simultaneously in finitude and in its relationality. The relationship with otherness is impelled precisely by a desire for a loving encounter, rather than, as Hugo Achugar explains, by a *vanguardista* crisis of the Word: 'El destino y el origen poético del otro está en «dolores ajenos». El dolor ajeno funda la palabra que funda un mundo. En el principio no está el Verbo fundando un mundo solipsista sino los Otros' (1985: 99). The ruptures and uncertainties arising from a traumatic past characterised by overwhelming loss and subsequently cultivated and reinforced by Gelman's poetry never disappear, but rather extend to create a vision of a de-centred poetic self impelled by the pain of the other.

As previously described, the trauma arising from the awareness of finitude is endlessly repeated in Gelman's poetry, but rather than enacting despair, his poetry is characterised by the expression of a desire for relationality. The personal is expressed in terms of universality, and the affective poetic register functions to enforce an empathetic encounter between the self and the other. As in Zurita's work, the trauma at the heart of the poetry is never cathartically expunged, but remains as an often-physical presence that cannot be ignored. This is evidenced both thematically, and in the formal and linguistic fragmentation typical of Gelman's poetics. Furthermore, the poetic self obeys the ethical

imperative to resist wholeness in the light of the intense fragmentation of being enacted by the dictatorship and its accompanying horrors, such that the poetic voice is endlessly dislocated. This act is the necessary precursor to the possibility of the inclusion of the voice of the other without submission to a Nerudean voicing of otherness.

### ***I Contain Multitudes: Dialogues with Otherness***

In his poetic *oeuvre*, Gelman seeks to create a community of gathered fragmented voices within a genre that is typically overshadowed by the singularity of the poet's voice. Gelman's fragmented, dislocated poetic voice ceaselessly cultivates a relationship with otherness through a process of dialogue and encounter. An understanding of this central opening out onto otherness is crucial to understanding Gelman's poetic commitment to equality. This is because the equal encounter between finite subjects is the basis for the future community that he envisages in the poetry. In considering the possibility of the creation of community that is commensurate with the production of equality, it is useful to turn to Jacques Rancière's thinking on community, since his combination of an emphasis on the individual with a rejection of the trappings of neoliberal individualism resonates well with Gelman's production of fragmentary communities.

According to Rancière, to speak of a community characterised by equality is nonsensical. One can speak of a community of equals, but the social order is necessarily unequal. For Rancière, politically productive community remains uncertain and unstable, and is made possible because of the partitions which allow individuals to be alone-together. Rancière explores the significance of this 'aloneness' in *The Emancipated Spectator*, where he analyses the French art collective Campement Urbain, and their project *Je et Nous*. At the time the Campement Urbain collective was comprised of artist Sylvie Blocher, urban architect Francois Daune, and sociologist Josette Faidit. In this collaborative project that took place between 2003 and 2008, the group engaged with residents of Sevran, a socially-deprived suburb of Paris. In conversation with residents – many of whom were North African immigrants – the group worked to conceive of a place within the city where individuals could be absolutely alone. As Rancière describes it, the installation would be 'dedicated to a specific end – solitude – meaning that it would be conceived and established as a place that could only be occupied by one person at a time for the purposes of solitary contemplation or meditation' (2009b: 53). However, the project also engaged notions of collective ownership

and responsibility, and of collective aesthetic production. The aesthetic community which these artists set out to create was therefore characterised by disconnection, and at the same time, by togetherness.

For Rancière, this being-together-apart also characterises the ability of the aesthetic to function politically (that is to say, dissensually). The aesthetic is:

a multiplication of connections and disconnections that reframe the relation between bodies, the world they live in and the way in which they are 'equipped' to adapt to it. It is a multiplicity of folds and gaps in the fabric of common experience that change the cartography of the perceptible, the thinkable and the feasible. As such, it allows for new modes of political construction of common objects and new possibilities of collective enunciation. (Ibid: 72)

The dislocation of the community therefore makes possible an enunciation of the collective. The collective is comprised of a number of *Is* (*Jes*) who each maintain their individual subjectivity while also being able to combine in the aesthetic or dissensual community of the *Us* (*Nous*). Furthermore, as Todd May explains, the very existence of such a commonality or collective, characterised by the gathering of individuals who retain their togetherness-apart, is precisely the grounds for the political:

The active expression of equality envisions a *community of equals*, a gathering of equally intelligent people conducting lives in common. The lives are neither the fulfilment of roles allotted by a police order nor chaotic expressions of passing individual fancy. They are, or would be, or perhaps could be, lives whose meaning arises from participation in a commonality without identity, a subjectification without subjection. The vision of such lives is already a threat to any police order. (2008: 184)

Rancière's theory of equality is therefore far from being individualist. Indeed, equality under his terms can only be verified as a collective project, since intelligence is defined precisely through contact with the other.

This new equal intelligence thus stands in opposition to the Cartesian intelligence which is identified as a result of the withdrawal of the self from the senses. Instead, as Rancière writes in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 'we have a new thinking subject who is aware of himself through the action he exerts on himself as on other bodies' (1991: 54). Gelman, I argue in what follows, subscribes to a similar idea about the gathering of fragmented individuals into an incomplete community (or collectivity), and the encounter with otherness is therefore a vital project throughout his work. I have already discussed the significance of the way in which throughout his *oeuvre*, the poet employs transgendered identification as a

means of encountering and entering into dialogue with a distinct other. To the same end, Gelman explores heteronymic poetry, poetry that translates real and imagined works, poetry that quotes other voices (including quasi-testimonial poetry), and poetry featuring a dialogic intertextuality with both elite and popular art forms. The art thus becomes an intensely communal production, such that even when the poetic self is explicitly present in first-person pronouns, the other can be incorporated into the work.

This incorporation of otherness occurs most strikingly in Gelman's use of heteronyms in the creation of his poetry. In some instances, the appeal to the heteronym allows him to present his poetry as the translation of another's (nonexistent) work – as in the case of the *Traducciones I, II, and III*, the poetry of the heteronymic John Wendell, Yamanokuchi Ando, and Sidney West, respectively. In others, it allows him to present his voice as an introduction to the work of another poet who is unable to publish in his own right, as in the case of the two political heteronyms, José Galván (who was supposedly captured and tortured under military rule) and Julio Grecco (who was killed in armed combat). The poetry ascribed to these latter two heteronyms is included in the *Interrupciones II* collection.

Alicia Genovese argues that Gelman's use of heteronyms in his poetry 'implica el desplazamiento del nombre del autor, la borradura de la autoría, a través de la creación de un autor ficticio, produce un distanciamiento máximo del yo poético en relación con su objeto' (2001: 20). With regard to the earlier heteronymic poetry published in the *Traducciones*, this argument is well-substantiated. Gelman himself, in interview with Mario Benedetti, stresses his desire to distance himself from the growing intimacy of his poetry: 'cuando empecé con el inglés, fue para *extrañarme* de algo que me estaba ocurriendo [...] porque mi poesía se estaba volviendo muy íntimo' (1972: 229). The poetry written by these early heteronyms constitutes both a formal and thematic departure from Gelman's earlier work. The poet works to emphasise the foreign nature of the work, with the inclusion of proper nouns in English and Japanese introducing a 'desplazamiento' that is also, to use Gelman's term, an 'extrañamiento': an estrangement or defamiliarisation of its subject matter that gives the verses the power to highlight aspects of reality normally 'lost in translation'. As in Genovese's argument, therefore, there is a degree of splitting of the poetic self implicit in the use of these earlier heteronyms. However, the later heteronyms – Grecco and Galván – write stylistically and thematically very closely to Gelman himself. The fragmentary punctuation and the striking use of virgules continue to feature heavily, and the thematic and imagistic content of his *oeuvre* in general is sustained. Rather than presenting a deconstruction of the poetic self, therefore, I suggest they function as the performance of dialogue with an



otherness of *experience* such that the art becomes an intensely communal production, as José Galván explains:

y según Oscar Wilde en arte no hay primera persona/  
pero Maiakovsky y Vallejo hablaron en primera persona/  
tenían el yo lleno de gente/ y Walt Whitman también/ (1986: 83)

The ‘yo lleno de gente’ – the Whitmanesque containment of multitudes – which the poem posits here expresses both a community of otherness *and* a fragmented self, and is therefore key to the aesthetic project, demonstrating a simultaneous commitment to the de-centring of the poetic self and to the inclusion of the voice of the other. In Genovese’s terms, the use of heteronyms in Gelman’s work functions to ensure that ‘la identidad autorial se disgrega como esencia y se transforma en la continua búsqueda de un yo como un otro; es decir una máscara que dramatiza (esconde y muestra) la búsqueda del poeta’ (2001: 23).

A more typically problematic site for the voicing of otherness or its ‘representation’ is found in the testimonial literary genre,<sup>52</sup> which Gelman also approaches in his aesthetic construction of a relational community that is founded in finitude and fragmentation. Gelman’s most clearly testimonial work is the dramatic poem *La junta luz: Oratorio a las Madres de Plaza de Mayo* (1985). As María del Carmen Sillato notes, the work incorporates echoes of Brechtian theatre, as well as evocations of the mystic dialogues of San Juan de la Cruz (with the dialogues between the soul and God being transferred by Gelman to dialogues between the disappeared other and the people left behind – in this case, the poem takes the form primarily of a dialogue between ‘madre’ and ‘niño/niña’) (1998: 369). However, the work also has generic links with testimonial literature, not least because several passages are inspired by the testimonials of young Argentines imprisoned in concentration camps, gathered by the journalist Carlos Gabetta in his book *Todos somos subversivos*.<sup>53</sup> The mediating presence of the poet is made explicit from the outset as Gelman writes: ‘yo veo la escena así’, and this functions, among other textual features, to distinguish the poem from the simultaneous production of testimony in the *Nunca Más* report (published the previous year, in 1984). As Sillato states, ‘*La junta luz* viene a constituir un aporte testimonial desde el ámbito literario, no como recopilación de hechos que eran ya de dominio público, sino como representación del dolor por las ausencias’ (1998: 370). This assessment, which implicitly emphasises the affective drive in Gelman’s poetic representations of trauma, coincides with

<sup>52</sup> The debate surrounding this genre is discussed in the introduction to this work.

<sup>53</sup> Gelman explicitly references this source in an explicatory note to the text.

his own earlier condemnation of a dry or journalistic evocation of human rights abuses in the poem 'Somas' from *Relaciones*.

This latter poem provides a clear example of the way in which Gelman's labour of *poiesis* functions predominantly through an appeal to affective rather than mimetic representation, this being fundamental to the dissensual equality which is thereby produced by the aesthetic project. The process by which a mass project of violence and murder becomes consensual requires a degree of dehumanising othering: if the enemy can be discursively constructed as somehow subhuman, the use of extraordinary measures can be more easily justified. It therefore becomes an urgent political project to rehumanise through the use of empathy and affect. Gelman's poem critiques an article published in the *Times Literary Supplement* which described human rights abuses in Argentina. It is one of the more famous examples demonstrating his commitment to a poetry founded in empathy and affect. He begins with an unambiguous criticism of the journalistic language of international concern that pretends solidarity with torture victims, but whose communion can only ever be partial and temporary:

los genitales se disiparon en la niebla de Londres  
 envueltos en las hojas amarillas del times literary supplement  
 la tinta los excitó  
 la tinta convirtió su rabia en hechos somáticos eróticos. (1980: 21)

In Jean Franco's terms, Gelman's critique here is founded on the realisation that 'the affectless language of journalism ensures that torture will soon become old news as far as the metropolis is concerned' (2002: 243). I suggest that Gelman here also raises the question about who has the right to represent and the right to consume.

The distance between writer and reader implicit in a mimetic representative paradigm arises from the same distance between cognitive understanding and affective experience. A purely mimetic form of representation prevents empathy and risks transforming horror into pleasure. Gelman counters this problem by proposing an alternative poetics which reproduces the violent interrogatory tactics of the torturer:

¿Y aplicar la picana en los genitales?  
 ¿Y quemar golpear el cuerpo tendido y volver a aplicar la picana eléctrica en los  
 genitales?  
 ¿Y volver a quemar golpear el cuerpo tendido y volver a aplicar la picana eléctrica en  
 los genitales? (1980: 21)

Gelman here highlights the uneven or differential nature of the affective experience of the event of torture. The insistent repetition of trauma, the creation of an overwhelming sense of accumulation of violence in the use of polysyndeton, and the interrogatory emphasis through the anaphoric ‘y’ at the beginning of every line means that this poem moves towards a mutual experiencing rather than about a didactic mimetic representation. In other words, the poem partially aims to re-create the effects of torture upon the body in pain. At the same time the poem reinforces the impossibility of a genuinely shared affective experience – reading an account of torture is clearly not an equivalent affective experience to being tortured.

Yet as Ben Bollig argues in his article ‘Néstor Perlongher and the Avant-Garde’, the positionality of the reader on the receiving end of an interrogation creates a certain alliance between the torture victim and the poetic witness:

The division the poem creates is: us–reasonable–witness–tortured/they–violent–perpetrator–torturer. ‘We’ are by implication centred on the tortured body: we are tortured, or can be tortured. Gelman’s text thereby posits a ‘nosotros’, a people, a space of communion in the text between author, narrative voice, and readers, whereby a common relation to military violence – a threat and something to be denounced – unites the persons involved. (2003: 174)

To build on Bollig’s argument, I contend that the affective focus of the poem functions here to gather voices within a certain kind of empathetically-defined community. It does so crucially without enforcing a fusion of self and other (or the fusion of the other and otherness in general) which is often to be observed in classical testimonial texts.

Similarly, the testimonial emphasis of *La junta luz* – one which is, nevertheless, far from resembling the representative ‘banal[ity]’ in Jean Franco’s terms, of the *Nunca Más* report – permits both the emergence of the voice of the other to tell their own tale, and the affective creation of empathy that is fundamental to Gelman’s poetic project. The testimonial recounting of disappearance and torture is stark and shocking:

un auto/dos hombres/  
me vendan los ojos/  
en la ciudad/ es la ciudad/  
el día/ el día/  
el subsuelo/  
la escalera/  
la pieza/  
¿dónde está tu familia?/  
la picana/  
los pechos/  
la vagina/

¿dónde está tu familia?/  
 querosén en los ojos  
 la boca  
 la nariz/ (1985: 33)

While the use of virgules is common in Gelman's work, here they have an even greater affective charge than usual, foregrounding the flashes of consciousness of the torture victim. The listing of body parts, far from being ordinary or banal, expresses the violence that borders on the unspeakable through the bleakness of the linguistic minimalism. The blurring of experience is evoked through the refusal to differentiate the voice of the captor from the violence applied to the body: as Sillato suggests, this additionally functions to highlight the extent of the horror to a putatively civilised world: 'la serialización entrecortada de los hechos crea un ambiente alucinante acorde con la irracionalidad de la situación que se describe' (1998: 373). Everything about this sequence is designed to shock, and therefore to function in terms of a Brechtian defamiliarisation.

Far from being simply a shocking evocation of torture, however, this poem continues Gelman's poetic task of community-building. As is the case in Zurita's work, once uncompromising finitude has been acknowledged, it is love that offers the basis for a political projection to the future. Just as in Zurita's poetry, love does not overcome death, but paradoxically coexists alongside it. See, for instance, this dialogue between a mother and disappeared child (significantly configured as 'niño' as in the *Carta abierta* collection):

niño:  
 fuimos uno

madre/(de primer plano izquierda)  
 ahora somos uno otra vez/ te busco/

coro/  
 te buscaré/ te encontraré/ te encuentro/ navegás mi sangre/ movés mi vientre otra vez/ mi pecho/ mi cabeza/ cantás en mi alma, pajarito/ dormís conmigo/ en mí

niño:  
 cuando me vuelvas a ver no me reconocerás/ el enemigo me quiso destruir/ me quiso convertir en trapo o cosa/ no me reconocerás

madre:  
 no/  
 serás tan bello (1985: 35)

The relationship between self and other evoked is here one which cannot be destroyed by finitude: the future tense sung by the chorus gives way to a definitive present, pointing towards the permanence of relationality. This is further highlighted by the corporeal links established between mother and child: just as before his birth, the ‘niño’ is once again incorporated into the mother, not only in her womb, but also in her very veins. Nor can the destruction wreaked by the enemy destroy the community thus founded in love: the mother reaffirms the beauty of her child even in the ruin of his body.

Similar to the tension of coexistent love and death is the tension of the simultaneous presence and absence of otherness that Gelman approaches in this testimonial poetry. The voice of the other is not open to facile appropriation because of its presence in absence. Furthermore, the self and the absent/present other are so intricately intertwined that the one speaks in the other, but not for the other:

¿y esas bestias dicen que no estás más aquí?  
 ¿y dónde estoy volando yo/ sino en vos?/  
 ¿y acaso yo no soy/ no te soy/ no soy vosyo? (1985: 13)

The unbreakable relationality of the ‘vosyo’ startlingly recalls Nancy’s ‘*you shares me*’, and points to the affinity between the community of otherness envisaged by Gelman and Nancy’s relational community founded in finitude.

The love that Gelman envisages at the heart of his poetry is a love founded in everyday relationality, not in grand acts of heroism or monumentalism. Love is, for Gelman, a paradoxical site in the face of the trauma which his poetry narrates. The third poem from the *Carta abierta* collection explicitly asks the question that is implicitly repeated throughout his poetry:

¿qué pedacitos puedo ya juntar?/  
 ¿cómo reamarte/amor callado en  
 lo que compraste con tu sangre niña?/ (1997: 134)

In other words, how can love and a new-found collectivity reemerge from fragmentation? The ‘pedacitos’ must remain fragmentary, and the sacrifice of life which the baby girl/son performs is endlessly repeated in the affective recounting of trauma. However, this is not to assume a negative outlook on the part of the poet. Gelman vacillates between declarations of love, and despair at its dissolution at the hands of political oppression, as in the prose poetry of *Bajo la lluvia ajena* (VI): ‘¿En qué lugar podría hablar la soledad? El que perdió sus hijos,

su másvida, ¿qué piedras escupiera por la boca? ¿Y quién las iba a recoger como señal de amor, o a entender, aceptar, recibir, aunque sea sentir en la ventana?’ (1980: 22). However, he never ceases the attempt to make love surface as the driving force behind the fragmented community towards which his poetry gestures. The love envisaged by Gelman is founded both in the exposition of finitude, and in the universalising emphasis on the colloquial or everyday.

Hugo Achugar emphasises the importance of the colloquial to Gelman’s poetry, configuring it in terms of the conversational and everyday poetry produced from the 1960s in Latin America (a tradition employed not only by Gelman, but also ‘Nicanor Parra, Ernesto Cardenal, Roque Dalton, Antonio Cisneros, Benedetti, Fernández Retamar y otros muchos’ [1985: 96]). This aesthetic tendency worked from a belief in the social possibilities of poetry, but not in a social poetry that was closer to political pamphleteering (as in the political poetry of the 1930s and 40s). Indeed, this poetry was born ‘fundamentalmente, de un sistema de valores estéticos en el que la noción de belleza es central’ (Ibid: 97). Yet nor was it an adherence to what Gelman understood as the solipsistic valorising of the aesthetic at the expense of the political or social found in the work of Octavio Paz, among others.<sup>54</sup> The principal difference between this new commitment to the everyday and that expressed in the poetry of, for instance, Neruda, is found, according to Achugar, in the relationship with otherness and with collectivity. Furthermore, the conversational nature of the poems does not preclude their adherence to high aesthetic principles, yet nor does the latter preclude the former (Ibid: 98).

Gelman indeed makes explicit reference to the high aesthetics of his vanguard precursors in the poem ‘Jueves pasado’, from *Violín y otras cuestiones* (in *Gotán*), through his employment of the trope of the onion:

También las ganas de charlar un rato,  
de todo, de cualquier cosa, de nada.  
De llorar a raíz de la cebolla  
y de reír a punto en la cuchara. (2004: 42)

<sup>54</sup> As Víctor Rodríguez Núñez (2001) points out, Gelman explicitly critiques the adherence of Paz et al to an aesthetic commitment to ‘poesía pura’, as in his satirical query in the poem ‘Bellezas’, from *Relaciones*:

Octavio Paz Alberto Jirri José Lezama Lima y demás  
obsedidos por la inmortalidad creyendo  
que la vida como belleza es estática e imperfecto el movimiento o impuro  
¿han comenzado a los cincuenta de edad  
a ser empujados por el terror de la muerte? (1980: 47)

Rodríguez Núñez instead argues that Gelman takes reality as his poetic source, employing both a generalised social critique and, at times, a specific socio-political attack.

Achugar notes the link with Neruda's 'Oda a la cebolla', but overlooks the parallels with Vallejo, another clear precursor of Gelman. As elsewhere in Neruda's work, Achugar suggests, the odes to the everyday in the *Odas elementales* do not relinquish their links to the prestigious Spanish Golden Age poetry, and thus fail to achieve the genuine expression of the everyday towards which the poet gestures. Gelman on the other hand finds his poetry in a certain embrace of the literary popular, and his use of language is such that it questions all literary precursors and influence – in this, he is closer to César Vallejo than to Neruda.

Vallejo used the onion as a symbol precisely of the need to erase the preconceptions surrounding linguistic and literary precedents: when the poet attempts to express himself as a messenger of some truth, to 'laurearse' and assume the guise of poet-prophet, the attempt culminates in bathos as he can only produce an empty effervescence (the 'espuma'), and his wreath is nothing more than an onion skin:

Quiero escribir, pero me sale espuma,  
[...]  
Quiero laurearme, pero me encebollo ('Intensidad y altura', from *Poemas humanos* 2011:63).

However, it is far from being the case that Gelman's poetry focuses on the colloquial and everyday at the expense of aesthetic complexity, or indeed that such an opposition is maintained in his work.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, the ruptures and uncertainties which Gelman's poetry cultivates interrogate one of the founding assumptions of much Latin American twentieth-century political poetry. In the terms used by González and Treece in *The Gathering of Voices*, the poetic development of the continent is characterised by a move away from the formalist defamiliarisation and alienation from reality characteristic of the *modernista* movement, and towards a 'celebratory return to "ordinary" discourse and "ordinary" experience' (1992: x). However, the dichotomies between artistic and political revolution and between popular and elite culture which this approach implies are challenged by Gelman's poetry and its gestures towards the production of an axiomatic equality.<sup>56</sup> For González and

<sup>55</sup> See, for instance, Gelman's use of neologism, his focus on a high artistic intertextuality (especially with the Sephardic poets in *Com/posiciones*, with the Spanish mystics and the Song of Songs in the *Carta abierta*, and with a vast array of Latin American poetic precursors throughout his work). This does not preclude, however, a simultaneous engagement with popular cultural references, in particular, the use of tango lyrics, which surfaces most clearly in the collection *Gotán*.

<sup>56</sup> In interview with Mario Benedetti, Gelman explicitly states the importance of a refusal to cede the techniques of high art in the face of the demands of the market for clarity, opacity, and facility: 'no se trata de bajar el nivel de la poesía, sino que, a través de la revolución [...] las masas pueden acceder no sólo a la poesía sino a todo lo

Treece, truly emancipatory poetry is that which, in its engagement with the popular, enters fully into the public domain, and permits the ‘gathering of voices’ to which their title refers. I have similarly argued for a certain gathering process in Gelman’s work; a gathering which insists upon the continued maintenance of the distance and difference between self and other.

Nevertheless, Gelman is acutely aware of the potential problem with such gathering whereby, especially within the poetic genre, the process by which these voices are gathered always runs the risk of the systematic appropriation and re-invention of the popular by an elite ‘vanguard’ which awards itself the task of mediating popular access to language, knowledge, and power. Furthermore, the location of poetry in the public proper is less straightforward in a dictatorial context in which surveillance, torture, and disappearance have radically redrawn the lines of division between public and private life. Gelman’s poetry resists this easy division of public and private, popular and elite, through his previously discussed commitment to the fragment. This, combined with his use of ambiguous and opaque language and imagery which are reminiscent of the aesthetic practices of the avant-garde is, paradoxically, fundamental to the democratising, dialogic effect of the poetry, and to the resistance of the divisions sustained by the avant-garde. The fragmentary remainders of self and others that people his poetry provide new possibilities for encounters which can resist a falsely celebratory wholeness. The process of ‘gathering’ at work in Gelman’s poetry is therefore not limited to a gathering of popular voices into the public sphere, but rather comprises a gathering of fragments, or a Benjaminian constellation, in which relationality supersedes unity. In Vallejo’s case, the refusal to assume the role of speaker for the dispossessed extended to a generalised refusal to embrace a clearly defined ethics for his poetics. In Gelman’s case, however, his focus on the ‘charla’, the ‘cebolla’ and the ‘cuchara’ of this early work forms the basis for the emphasis the poet places on love as the source for the affective force his poetry delivers. In ‘Tal vez’ in *Violín y otras cuestiones*, he configures love as one more everyday item (although related here in particular to the trappings of childhood):

Amor se dice de un extraño modo:

Cuna, pañal, la bata.  
Estas cosas comunes.  
Esas palabras blancas. (2004: 43)

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que la vida le puede ofrecer a un ser humano. De ese modo entiendo el sacrificio para la comunicación’ (1972: 196).



Here for Gelman, *commonality* resides in the *commonplace*, in the traces left by the other. And these traces or residues of otherness form the conception point for a relationality that is founded in love.

To return briefly to Nancy, love provides a vital base for the community that arises from the exposition of finitude, because it expresses itself through communication rather than communion. In Christopher Fynsk's terms:

Love, as Nancy defines it, is once again an experience of finite transcendence: the subject *finds itself* in love, *beyond itself*. This transcendence is not a movement from one being toward another; its transport happens (for all parties) by way of a transgression or effraction – love comes, so to speak, from the outside, and it is not the other subject that touches or exposes the subject in this manner, but what constitutes the otherness of the other. It is the singularity of the other that provokes love, provided we also understand by this term the making of a certain strangeness or otherness (in love this can take the form of a strange beauty). The subject in love is a subject exposed – exposed (affected) by the other and opening to the other: opening further to its exposure, opening to further exposure. What it knows of love is this exposure and what Nancy calls a ‘trembling on the edge of being’ – always a singular self coming to itself in the presence of the other, enjoying ‘itself’ only as the exposure to an alterity and as the transport of this exposure. One is traversed by the other, and traverses in this movement the limits of one's identity. (1991: xviii)

The love between father and son, between *compañeros*, or simply between self and other in the poetry of Gelman is thus the ultimate expression of relationality, alongside the relationality of finitude. The former cannot unwrite the latter, but it can mitigate its devastation. Indeed, the hope present in Gelman's poetry always arises from an emphasis on the importance of love, such that the damaged and broken voices that people his work have no other task than its expression, as here in poem XIX from the *Carta abierta*:

¿qué otro trabajo tenés/amor/sino  
amar? ¿mirando con ojos del alma?/  
¿desapartando sombras para ver  
lo que amás?/¿ojos que abrís fuertemente  
  
para ver lo que amás?/¿laceración  
o brillo/o bestia de dolor?/¿o lumbre  
que ilumina una cuna de esperar?/  
¿quién habrá de mecer a la solita? (1997: 150)

The fragmentation which crucially underwrites all the poetry never disappears: the hijo remains ‘solita’ but is nevertheless rocked in his cradle in an act of love. Similarly, the

‘laceración’ is simultaneous with the ‘lumbre’ and the ‘brillo’, which recalls Zurita’s moment of optimistic illumination. In the end, trauma and optimism co-exist in Gelman’s poetry as in Zurita’s. This poem combines a horror that is contemporaneous with love, and a fragmentation that posits nonetheless a new kind of wholeness or collectivity. The relationship with otherness is thus one founded in an intense and profound equality, one which evinces new modes of being-together-apart.

### ***Relational Forces: Finitude and Love***

In the case of Zurita’s poetry, the relationship with otherness is subject to a greater tension than in Gelman’s work. In the *Canto de amor*, the relationality that is vital to the poetic labour of imagining a community is shown to be destroyed by the torture which physically interrupts the poetic process through the associated enforced breakdown of language. The search for the other reaches its brutal limitation at this point, and it is from here that the community must be rebuilt – from its total destruction:

– En la oscuridad te busqué, pero nada pueden ver los chicos lindos bajo la venda de los ojos.

[...]

– Murió mi chica, murió mi chico, desaparecieron todos.

Desiertos de amor. (1985: 12)

Zurita works towards the encounter with otherness from the (forced) positioning of the self in the isolation of the desert. This imposition of solitude explains in some measure the tension in Zurita’s work between the sometimes insistent inscription of the poetic ‘I’, and the splitting of the self, or the breakdown of the ‘I’s centripetal force’ (Deeny 2009: 109).

In the collection *Purgatorio*, the poet returns again and again to a first-person present tense which has the effect of firmly inscribing himself and his actions (in particular his own body) into the poetic reality. The very first poem from the collection (barring the passport image, and the various dedications and introductions) introduces the themes that characterise the first section (entitled ‘En el medio del camino’):

Me amanezco  
Se ha roto una columna

Soy una Santa digo (1979: 15)

The sleeplessness that is a result of recalling a traumatic memory is here combined with an underlying physical violence: the ‘columna’ – either abstractly, a (phallic) column, or literally, a spine – represents both a generalised expression of violence, specifically the violence of torture, and a movement beyond the masculine, if we consider the ‘columna’ to represent a phallic symbol. As a result, Zurita begins his identification with the symbolic position of femininity, also expressed in his self-description as ‘una Santa’. This transgendered subject position both permits the poet to disrupt structures of heterosexual normativity, and to introduce the suggestion that the self might (quasi-schizophrenically) *include* the ‘other’, or a multitude of ‘others’ within its individual subjectivity. This recalls the ‘yo lleno de gente’ that is so significant to Gelman’s aesthetic.

At the heart of the tension between the desire for an encounter with otherness and the repeated inscription of the poetic self lies the relationship with that very selfhood, which is split between self-love and self-loathing. Poem III of *Purgatorio* provides a clear expression of that tension:

Todo maquillado contra los vidrios  
me llamé esta iluminada dime que no  
el Super Estrella de Chile  
me toqué en la penumbra    besé mis piernas

Me he aborrecido tanto estos años (1979: 16)

The reference to the poet’s legs here recalls another poem by Neruda, entitled ‘Ritual de mis piernas’, published in *Residencia en la tierra*. In Neruda’s work, the poet subjects his own physicality to an intensive (and largely objective) scrutiny, which accompanies a shift in perspective, from a sensation of intense corporeal alienation, to an awareness and acceptance of the self as body. In Zurita’s case, however, the intense and objective scrutiny is replaced by a simple act of tenderness: the kissing of the legs. This means that the physicality of the poet’s body is expressed in a physical act, rather than in a long linguistic description, and thus the poet restores the physical to the sphere of the poetic. The tender act of self-love is coupled also with a potentially more sexual act – ‘me toqué en la penumbra’ – which evokes the touching of masturbation, and provides a link to the self-loathing – ‘Me he aborrecido’ – the poet describes.

It is the insistent use of the feminine, however, which here permits Zurita truly to approach otherness without relinquishing the complex and dialectical splitting between love

and hate in the position of the poetic self. As elsewhere in Zurita's poetry, this feminine alignment is subject to a certain schizoid splitting. In *Purgatorio*, the feminisation of selfhood is enacted from the outset, in the prologue which simultaneously describes the poet's self-mutilation:

Mis amigos creen que  
estoy muy mala  
porque quemé mi mejilla (1979: 10)

Here the feminine other is described as 'mala' which, as Mario Rodríguez Fernández suggests, evokes moral or sexual 'maldad': prostitution. This interpretation is, he argues, strengthened by the subsequent self-description provided by 'Raquel', one of the female alter egos of the text, in which she refers to her 'oficio' (1985: 116). In the first place, then, the other is bad, and later, she is also mad, 'mala de la cabeza', and the subject of psychiatric reports. 'La locura y la prostitución, una doble enfermedad que degrada la razón y el cuerpo, define a un sujeto desdoblado en dos, a un hermafrodita que participa de la masculinidad: es un Cristo neurótico (un anticristo), y de la femineidad: es una prostituta (una antivirgen)' (Ibid: 116). However, we can point to an additional splitting of the feminised other, because elsewhere in the collection, she is also 'una Santa', 'la iluminada', and 'la Inmaculada' (Zurita, 1979: 15-16). The sacred and the profane, sin and redemption, the loathing for the self and the love for the collective, are therefore always intricately interwoven in Zurita's work.

The love-hate dialectic established by the poetic voice can only find its resolution in collectivity and the encounter between self and other. *Purgatorio* is characterised by the negation of selfhood, but in *Anteparaíso*, we find a glimmer of hope resulting from the encounter with otherness:

Apartaré de ti mi rabia y rencor  
y si te encuentro nuevamente, en ti me iré amando. (1982: 105)

As in Gelman's 'vosyo', it is the recognition of the total relationality of being that offers the hope for the new commonality. Death is endlessly relational, yet so too is love – the self can only be loved in and through love for the other. In interview with Neustadt, Zurita points to this love as the only possibly redemption from traumatic revelation of finitude: 'La dictadura fue una experiencia horrible en la que paralelamente se dieron las muestras más extremas de compañerismo, de solidaridad, de amor. [...] Tú hablabas con alguien en el filo del toque de

queda y toda tu vida se iba en ese otro' (2000: 94). Zurita argues that this acceptance of absolute otherness and the encounter with the singular other that is founded in communication (love) is the first thing to be forgotten once the revelation of finitude is no longer so explicit: 'Ese amor increíble fue lo primero que olvidamos. Lo único que aprendimos del miedo es lo primero que olvidamos. Esa y no otra es la condena de la transición' (Ibid: 94). The political project for the poetry is therefore clear: the rediscovery of relationality through the insistent exposition of finitude, and of the parallel force of relationality: love.

### ***Conclusion: Enacting Dispute***

I have argued throughout this chapter that, although they employ different aesthetic practices in their poetry, both Gelman and Zurita attempt in their work a political projection of *poiesis* – that is, the construction of a community of relationality founded paradoxically in finitude and fragmentation, *and* in the loving encounter with otherness. The poets both work to sustain the borders separating individuals within the community, and even the limits and fragmentations that separate each subject from itself, or rather from a conception of any selfhood that is characterised by wholeness or completion. In this, they retain a commitment to a mimetic representation of the fracturing of the body personal and the body politic under dictatorship, thereby refusing to allow the wounds of the past to go unexamined. Yet while maintaining those very borders, their poetry also attempts to create a space for a new kind of being-together-apart. The poetry envisages a community that is founded in communication rather than in communion – and in dispute rather than consensus.

I locate therefore a double dispute conducted by the poetry that represents precisely its political project – a project that aims to alter the terms under which the sensible distribution of the post-dictatorship community is conceived and represented. In the first place, the poetry represents a dispute with the consensus government of post-dictatorship Argentina and Chile. As I have described, both governments have been characterised as amnesiac, attempting to forget and thus move on from trauma. In both nations, until the very recent present, there have been no attempts at meaningful remembrance, not even from the point of view of a cathartic working-through of trauma for the mental health of the nation. A frequent aesthetic response in the post-dictatorship period has been to foreground a melancholic insistence upon the lingering presence of trauma in the national subconscious,

thereby forcing a focus upon the violence and degradation of the past. In the poetry of both Gelman and Zurita, the presence of the past in the present – fragmenting and disrupting – is certainly a crucial aspect of the expression of a political aesthetic. But it is not the only dispute they enact in their poetry.

Rather, in the second place, both poets also enact a dispute with the move towards a neoliberal individualism that resists the formation of a meaningful collective. Indeed, the resistance to (corporeal and political) wholeness found in the work of these poets does not preclude the envisioning of a newly birthed community. But the emphasis should be on the newness of the community the poets work to conceive and express – it is community imagined in a way that not only acknowledges but actively privileges its historical core of death, trauma, and fracture. However, this is far from being a uniquely melancholic dwelling on past violence; rather, the collectivity imagined by Gelman and Zurita works to include death and fragmentation precisely because they are forces of relationality. In accepting and recognising the death of the (beloved or unknown) other, the poets also acknowledge their own placement within the broken community. And in yearning towards the parallel relational force of love, they demonstrate their desire to continue to *create*, both aesthetically and politically. The coexistence of love and death in the poetry represents a political project that is both dissensual *and* creative and demonstrates a belief in the creation of a political poetry that is conceived as aesthetic labour.

**Conclusion:**

**The Love with Which I Hate**

*Si me dieran a elegir, yo elegiría  
este amor con que odio,  
esta esperanza que come panes desesperados.*

Juan Gelman, 'El juego en que andamos', *Gotán*.

### ***Refusing the Limit***

As I have been editing and entering corrections for this work, I came across two poems by Juan Gelman that somehow escaped my notice when I was carrying out the bulk of my reading. The two poems are from the 1956-58 collection *El juego en que andamos*, published in *Gotán* (2004 [1996]). The first, 'El juego en que andamos' is partially reproduced in the epigraph above, and the second, 'Límites', reads as follows:

¿Quién dijo alguna vez: hasta aquí la sed,  
hasta aquí el agua?

¿Quién dijo alguna vez: hasta aquí el aire,  
hasta aquí el fuego?

¿Quién dijo alguna vez: hasta aquí el amor,  
hasta aquí el odio?

¿Quién dijo alguna vez: hasta aquí el hombre,  
hasta aquí no?

Sólo la esperanza tiene las rodillas nítidas.  
Sangran. (2004: 68)

In one respect it is somewhat dispiriting to find so well-encapsulated a summary of what I have spent the last some 80,000 words trying to express. But then again, perhaps it is serendipitous to have such an eloquent partner in my attempts to summarize my arguments so far, and to draw some conclusions.

Gelman's poem pulls together many of the themes and ideas that I have been working to assemble in the text above. Firstly, on a political-thematic level, it works to dismantle the boundaries of sensible reality that hierarchise and divide. It asks the question – how do we decide what are the limits of all our human experiences? Who is included in the version of that consensual reality in which we are living? Who is excluded? And crucially, who is making those decisions, and why? These are precisely the questions that the artworks and texts I have studied seek to address in their critique of the transitions to democracy in



Argentina and Chile. While the putatively democratic transitions continue to operate according to the social and economic divisions that undergirded the dictatorships, they also continue to order and hierarchise the subjects that people the public sphere. They participate, that is, in the production and reproduction of profound inequality. Secondly, on an aesthetic level, Gelman here politically positions the poem within an alternative sensory realm. Any hope for a more just distribution of socio-political reality in the future is founded in the bleeding knees – in other words, in the body as an alternative sensorium. The wound is crucial to this new sensorium – it highlights the seepage of the past into the present, and it points to the dissolution of physical boundaries between subjects that would otherwise appear unassailable. And the body as a living, growing, hurting, bleeding entity makes clear the physical nature of the re-ordering of the sensible realm which the poetry seeks. The political and the aesthetic are thus profoundly linked in these few lines. It is only in their linking, and in the discovery and development of new means of conceiving of sensible reality, that the political labour of the poetry can take place.

Throughout this work, I have traced similar connections between the political and the aesthetic in literary and artistic works produced in the final years of the dictatorship and the early years of the post-dictatorship periods in Argentina and Chile. This period provided a vital frame through which to consider the relationship between the categories of the political and the aesthetic for two reasons. In the first place, it was a moment in literary and artistic history at which the boundaries of the aesthetic were being re-considered and re-drawn thanks to the lifting of dictatorial censorship, the application of new technologies to the production of artworks, and a new consideration of the limitations of the aesthetic. In the second place, the political itself came under question at this same juncture, owing to the broad critique levelled by the political left of the democratic transition in both nations. The very nature of democracy was called into doubt as a result of the continuity – political, economic, and social – between dictatorship and post-dictatorship, and the concomitant perception of politics as a model that strove for consensus rather than dissensus. This work, therefore, has situated the texts under study at a crucial point in aesthetico-political thought in the Southern Cone. Of course, it bears saying that this work does not and cannot represent the full story of the relationship between politics and aesthetics at this juncture in the Southern Cone – there are multiple other authors and artists working in the postdictatorship to discover new sensible distributions and configurations of political reality that served a goal of equality. Rather it offers a snapshot of the particular way the historico-political moment and

the conception of the aesthetic inter-related at a certain moment in time and geographical location.

According to Jean Franco's provocative analysis in *The Decline and Fall of the Lettered City*, the division between the political and the aesthetic, the serious committed text and the frivolous story, is the characteristic opposition around which Latin American literary production in the twentieth century was structured. Franco argues that during the Cold War, the academic distinction between pure or autonomous, and politically committed, art was transformed into a tool for political machination, with the USA favouring and sponsoring the production of the former, and the Soviet Union the latter. Undermining both positions within the binary opposition, Franco first suggests that 'the marriage of aesthetics to revolutionary politics was a difficult one' as the committed art principally endorsed by the Cuban government and its flagship publishing house *Casa de las Américas* became ever more closely wedded to explicit state censorship (2002: 95). On the other hand, those praising the political neutrality of writing and embracing the autonomy of art often worked squarely within the strictures of politics, with the move to abstraction being ideologically motivated by US policies of international consolidation, and the value of the universal disguising 'a not-so-subtle attack on national, ethnic, and local cultures' (Ibid: 2). This compelling notion of consensual adherence to one side or other of a mutually exclusive dichotomy is, nevertheless, challenged by the authors and artists whose work has been analysed above.

In this work, I located the onset of this challenge to the clear division of aesthetics and politics in the *escena de avanzada* which arose during the dictatorship in Chile, and particularly in the work of the Chilean art collective CADA. In many ways, as I argued in the first chapter, the *escena de avanzada* problematically repeated many of the aesthetico-political failures of the avant-garde that it aimed to rectify and transcend. Most notably, the claimed equality of the political and the aesthetic as championed by artists of the avant-garde in manifestos and theoretical works often collapsed in the aesthetic reality of their artworks. In the work of CADA, I discovered a similar theoretical commitment to the dissolution of the boundaries separating the categories of the political and the aesthetic, alongside a similar practical privileging of the political at the expense of the aesthetic. In cases where an explicitly aesthetic framing was perceived as necessary to the delineation of the artwork as an aesthetic category (as in the use of video technology to demarcate the aesthetic nature of the political intervention), I argued that the group demonstrated a continued subordination of the artwork to institutionally sanctioned means of categorizing and restricting the domain of the

aesthetic. Similarly, in the case of the dominance of the manifesto that CADA so frequently issued to accompany its *acciones*, the group demonstrated its lack of faith in the aesthetic as a category that might stand alone. Once again here, the artwork relied upon a supporting explicatory device or document. In other words, while CADA explored new and undoubtedly exciting new frameworks and canvases for the artwork, the sought-after aesthetico-political moment that would make art and life indivisible proved unattainable. In these instances, the *escena de avanzada* in general, and CADA in particular, demonstrated the continued validity of Franco's analysis of art in the twentieth century and its inability to relinquish the divisions separating the political from the aesthetic, even as it explicitly desired to do so.

However, my analysis of the work of CADA delved further into a consideration of the relationship between the historical avant-garde and the neo-avant-garde, with a suggestion that CADA was in fact able to move beyond several of the failings of the former through its unique relationship with the body (the body of the text, and the body corporeal). In the group's aesthetic centralising of the body as a disruptive supplement within the political sphere, CADA opened the door to a new means of conceiving the political aesthetic – one in which an irreducible corporality, a messy materiality, and a joyful, indefatigable sexuality took centre stage. This renewed focus on the body as a vital category of the aesthetic offers an insight into a political parallel I have established between all the artists and authors whose work features here – namely, their focus on the aesthetic as a labour of creation, as a life-affirming counterpoint to the numbing quasi-participation in the political sphere demanded by the consensus government of the neoliberal post-dictatorship. I began this work by drawing a comparison between these texts and artists through the image of the wound, positing an artistic connection between the wound as aesthetic image and the perception of the political reality expressed by these authors and artists. In their vision of wounded democracy, the texts under study above simultaneously expressed the unresolved and irresolvable divisions and ruptures of the violent and abusive dictatorial past, and highlighted the failed reality of transitional democracy, founded in consensus and a blurring of the recent tragic past. Yet the image of the wound, I argued, also pointed to the ongoing political commitment of these texts. The wound could also be an opening, a disavowal of borders, and a dissensual refusal of broken voices to be contained and constrained. The wounded body represents the recontextualisation of the boundaries that separate individuals from one another, and it foreshadows an opening up to a new kind of community and commonality.

As the early focus in this work on the wound suggests, the body has been central to this analysis and its reconsideration of the relationship between the political and the aesthetic

at this historical and artistic juncture in the Southern Cone. In Chapter II, I highlighted in the works of Pedro Lemebel and Néstor Perlongher, the anchorage of dissensus within bodies that are conspicuously ‘out-of-place’ in the neoliberal city. The hyper-sexual, hyper-corporeal, and subversively desiring bodies that both authors engaged as a focus for much of their work rejected any classificatory hierarchy, while at the same time shifting the focus away from neoliberal individualism and towards a new and broader conception of community. The out-of-place body – and in particular the relationships between such bodies – formed a central component of this community according to my analysis, owing to these bodies’ always disruptive relationality with the ordering of the city, and to their ability to disturb the socially required boundaries separating self and other. In Chapter III the focus on community and the body shifted to a consideration of the body politic, and the way it could be conceived and represented after its fracturing under dictatorship. The poetic works of Juan Gelman and Raúl Zurita, I argued, walked a fine line between desiring to honour and sustain that fragmentation, and simultaneously desiring the possibility of expressing community once more. Once again the body, and specifically the finite and mortal body, played a vital role in achieving this political balancing act. The community envisaged by both poets, I suggested, was one founded in an acknowledgement of the centrality of death – and the deceased, decaying bodies that such a centrality implies – at the core of the community. The community that is made up of corporeal beings is also a community made up of beings who share a common mortality, and in recognising this shared death at the centre of the community, the poets I discussed in this chapter were able both to remain faithful to the recent trauma to the body politic and to envision a being-together that was the precursor to a newfound expression of community.

The corporeal, as I suggested in Chapter III, works to make clear the shared nature of the mortal reality of all members of the community. It establishes a link between individuals that counters the individualising trends of the neoliberal post-dictatorial era. In so doing, it underscores the radical equality between beings that lies in their shared corporality. The body, here, permits the expression of a relationality in which self and other are simultaneously together, in-between, and apart. But the body is not only present in these works in the form of a recurring symbol or image. The text (by which I intend all of the artworks discussed here, not merely those that are textual in form) is itself conceived as a quasi-body, and it circulates through the power of the ordinary, everyday stories it tells, in the same anarchic way as the bodies that appear within the texts. In other words, the bodies that take centre stage in the artworks created by CADA, Lemebel, Perlongher, Gelman, and Zurita

are the doubles for the texts that contain them. The bodies in the texts circulate, and in their role as textual images, they create both singularity and relationality for the communities imagined within the texts. But because the texts themselves also circulate, following the model of the errant bodies they contain, they themselves similarly offer a model for a new space of communication. The political aesthetic of the body and of the text as body is based upon the joy of storytelling, upon the imaginative encounter between selfhood and alterity, and upon the aesthetic pleasure in the interactive relation with art. As such, the text is envisaged as a creative space for communication within which each and every reader/participant is imagined as the intellectual equal of the other subjectivities which they encounter through the work. These communities are always tentative, even uncertain, and within the texts, they frequently fail. Yet the labour of *poeisis* stubbornly remains, and the texts, the products of that labour, continue in their circulation to disrupt the limitations of categories both aesthetic and political. In this regard, the works I have discussed here are united by their creative endeavour to challenge the boundaries of political possibility in the post-dictatorship period, and to glimpse, in their encounters with these boundaries, the beginnings of something quite different.

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